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THE PEASANTRY
PIERRE GRASSOU

D. Murrat Smith

"HE HAS KILLED ME, THE SCAMP!"

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H. DE BALZAC

THE PEASANTRY
ABOUT CATHERINE DE' MEDICI

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED BY

ELLEN MARRIAGE and CLARA BELL

WITH PREFACES BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

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PREFACE.

Few, I suppose, of the readers of "Les Paysans" (The Peasantry) in more recent years have read it without a more or less distinct mental comparison with the corresponding book in the Rougon-Macquart series. And I should hope that this comparative process has had, in the best minds, only one result. "Les Paysans" (which, by the way, is a very late book, partly posthumous, and is said, though not on positive authority, to have enjoyed the collaboration of Madame de Balzac) is not one of Balzac's best ; but it is as far above "La Terre" (The Land) from every conceivable point of view, except that of Holywell Street,* as a play of Shakespeare is above one of Monk Lewis.

The comparison, indeed, exhibits something more than the difference of genius in Balzac and in M. Zola. It illustrates the difference of their methods. We know how not merely the Rougon-Macquart series in general, but "La Terre" in particular, was composed. M. Zola, who is a conscientious man, went down to a village (somewhere in the Beauce, if I recollect rightly), stayed some time, made his notes, and came back to Paris. There is nothing like the same great gulf fixed between the Londoner and the countryman in England as that which exists between the Parisian and the Provincial in France. But imagine an Englishman, not even English by race, from his youth up an inhabitant of great towns, attempting to delineate the English peasantry after a few weeks' stay in a Wiltshire village!

Balzac, on the other hand, a Frenchman of Frenchmen, was born in a French country town, was brought up in the country, and, what is more, was in the constant habit of

* Socialists' headquarters, London.

retiring to out-of-the-way country inns and similar places to work. He had the key to begin with; and he never let it get rusty. To some tastes and judgments his country sketches, if less lively, are more veracious even than his Parisian ones; they have less convention about them; they are less obviously under the dominion of prepossessions and crotchets, less elaborately calculated to form backgrounds and scenery for the evolutions of Rastignacs and Rubemprés.

The result is, in "Les Paysans," a book of extraordinary interest and value. In one respect, indeed, it falls short of the highest kind of novel. There is no character in whose fortunes or in whose development we take the keenest interest. Blondet is little more than an intelligent chorus or reporter, though he does not tell the story; Montcornet is a good-natured "old silly;" the Countess is—a Countess. Not one of the minor characters, not even Rigou, is very much more than a sketch. But then there is such a multitude of these sketches, and they are all instinct with such life and vigor! Although Balzac has used no illegitimate attractions —think only of the kind of stuff with which M. Zola, like a child smearing color on a book-engraving, would have daubed the grisly outlines of the Tonsard family!—he has not shrunk from what even our modern realists, I suppose, would allow to be "candor;" and his book is as masterly as it is crushing in its indictment against the peasant.

Is the indictment as true as it is severe and well urged? I am rather afraid that we have not much farther to look than at certain parts of more than one of the Three Kingdoms to see that we need not even limit ourselves to the French peasant in admitting that it is. There are passages in the book which read as if they might be extracts *mutatis mutandis* (with necessary changes) from a novel on the Irish Land League or the Welsh Anti-Tithe Agitation. To a certain extent, no doubt, the English peasant, at least when he is not Celtic, is rather less bitten with actual "land-hunger" than the Frenchman;

and even when he is a Celt, it does not seem to be so much land-hunger proper as a dislike to adopting any other occupation which drives him to crime. Moreover, Free Trade and other things have made land in the United Kingdom very much less an object of positive greed than it was in France eighty years ago, or, indeed, than it is there still. Yet the main and special ingredients of a land agitation—the ruthless disregard of life, the indifference to all considerations of gratitude or justice, the secret-society alliance against the upper classes—all these things are delineated here with an almost terrifying veracity.

For individual and separate sketches of scenes and characters (with the limitation above expressed) the book may vie almost with the best. The partly real, partly fictitious, otter-hunting of the old scoundrel Fourchon is quite first-rate; and it is of a kind rarely found in French writers till a time much more modern than Balzac's. The machinations of Gaubertin, Sibilet, and Rigou are a little less vivid; but the latter is a masterly character of the second class, and perhaps the best type in fiction of the intelligent sensualist of the lower rank —of the man hard-headed, harder-hearted, and entirely destitute of any merit but shrewdness. The character of Bonnébault is a little, a very little, theatrical; the *troupier français* (French soldier) debauched, but not ungenerous, appears a little too much in his cartoon manner. "La Pechina" wants fuller working out; but she affords one of the most interesting touches of the comparison above suggested in the scene between her, Nicolas, and Catherine. One turns a little squeamish at the mere thought of what M. Zola would have made of it in the effort to make clear to the lowest apprehension what Balzac, almost without offense, has made clear to all but the very lowest. Michaud is good and not overdone; and of his enemies the Tonsards—enough has been said. They could not be better in their effectiveness; and, I am afraid, they could not be much better in their truth. Here, at least, if

the moral picture is grimy enough, Balzac cannot, I think, be charged with having exaggerated it, while he cannot be denied the credit of having presented it in extraordinarily forcible and brilliant colors and outlines.

"Les Paysans," owing to the lateness of its appearance, was less pulled about than almost any other of its author's books. It, or rather the first part of it, appeared under the title "Qui Terre à guerre a" (who wage war for land) in the "Presse" for December, 1844. Nothing more appeared during the author's life; but in 1855 the "Revue de Paris" reprinted the previous portion and finished the book, and the whole was published in four volumes by de Potter in the same year.

"Pierre Grassou" is good in itself; it is very characteristic of its time, and it is specially happy as giving a touch of comedy, which is grateful. The figure of the artist-*bourgeois*, neither Bohemian nor *buveur d'eau* (water drinker), is excellently hit off, and the thing leaves us with all the sense of a pleasant afterpiece.

G. S.

THE PEASANTRY.

To M. P.-S.-B. Gavault.

"I have seen the manners of my time, and I publish these letters," wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau at the beginning of his "Nouvelle Héloise;" *can I not imitate that great writer and tell you that "I am studying the tendencies of my epoch, and I publish this work?"*

So long as society inclines to exalt philanthropy into a principle instead of regarding it as an accessory, this Study will be terribly true to life. Its object is to set in relief the principal types of a class neglected by the throng of writers in quest of new subjects. This neglect, it may be, is simple prudence in days when the working classes have fallen heirs to the courtiers and flatterers of kings, when the criminal is the hero of romance, the headsman is sentimentally interesting, and we behold something like an apotheosis of the proletariat. Sects have arisen among us, every pen among them swells the chorus of "Workers, arise!" even as once the Third Estate was bidden to "Arise!" It is pretty plain that no Herostratus among them has had the courage to go forth into remote country districts to study the phenomena of a permanent conspiracy of those whom we call "the weak" against those who imagine themselves to be "the strong"—of the Peasantry against the Rich. All that can be done is to open the eyes of the legislator, not of to-day, but of to-morrow. In the midst of an attack of democratic vertigo to which so many blind scribes have fallen victims, is it not imperatively necessary that some one should

paint the portrait of this Peasant who stultifies the Code by reducing the ownership of land to a something that at once is and is not? Here you shall see this indefatigable sapper at his work, nibbling and gnawing the land into little bits, carving an acre into a hundred scraps, to be in turn divided, summoned to the banquet by the bourgeois, who finds in him a victim and ally. Here is a social dissolvent, created by the Revolution, that will end by swallowing up the bourgeoisie, which in its day devoured the old noblesse. Here is a Robespierre, with a single head and twenty million hands, whose very insignificance and obscurity has put him out of the reach of the law; a Robespierre always at his work, crouching in every commune, enthroned in town council chambers, and bearing arms in the National Guard in every district in France, for in the year 1830 *France forgot that Napoleon preferred to run the risks of his misfortunes to the alternative of arming the masses.*

If during the past eight years I have a hundred times taken up and laid down the most considerable piece of work which I have undertaken; my friends, as you yourself, will understand that courage may well falter before such difficulties, and the mass of details essential to the development of a drama so cruelly bloodthirsty, but among the many reasons which induce something like temerity in me, count as one my desire to complete a work destined as a token of deep and lasting gratitude for a devotion which was one of my greatest consolations in misfortune.

De Balzac.

BOOK I.

He that hath the Land
Must fight for his own Hand.

I.

THE CHÂTEAU.

To Monsieur Nathan.

"THE AIGUES,
"*August* 6, 1823.

"Now, my dear Nathan, purveyor of dreams to the public, I will set you dreaming of the actual, and you shall tell me if ever this century of ours can leave a legacy of such dreams to the Nathans and the Blondets of 1923. You shall measure the distance we have traveled since the time when the Florines of the eighteenth century awoke to find such a castle as the Aigues in their contract.

"When you get my letter in the morning, dear friend of mine, from your bed will you see, fifty leagues away from Paris, by the side of the high road on the confines of Burgundy, a pair of red brick lodges separated or united by a green-painted barrier? There the coach deposited your friend.

"A privet hedge winds away on either side of the lodge gates; with trails of bramble like stray hairs escaping from it, and here and there an upstart sapling. Wild flowers grow along the top of the bank above the ditch bathed at their roots by the stagnant green water. To right and left the hedges extend as far as the coppice which skirts a double meadow, a bit of cleared forest, no doubt.

"From the dusty deserted lodges at the gates there stretches a magnificent avenue of elm-trees, a century old; the spreading tops meet in a majestic green arched roof overhead, and the road below is so overgrown with grass that you can scarcely see the ruts. The old-world look of the gate, the venerable elm-trees, the breadth of the alleys on either side which cross the avenue, prepare you to expect an almost royal castle. Before reaching the lodge I had had a look at the valley of the Aigues from the top of one of the slopes which we in France have the vanity to call a hill, just above the village of Conches, where we changed horses for the last stage. At the end the highway makes a detour to pass through the little sub-prefecture of Ville-aux-Fayes, where a nephew of our friend Lupeaulx lords it over the rural population. The higher slopes of the broad ridges above the river are crowned by the forest which stretches along the horizon line, and the whole picture is framed in the setting of the far-off hills of the Morvan—that miniature Switzerland. All this dense forest lies in three hands. It belongs partly to the Aigues, partly to the Marquis de Ronquerolles, partly to the Comte de Soulanges, whose country houses, parks, and villages, seen far down below in the valley, seem to be a realization of 'Velvet' Breughel, landscape fancies.

"If these details do not put you in mind of all the castles in Spain which you have longed to possess in France, this wonder-stricken Parisian's traveler's tale is clean thrown away upon you. Briefly, I have delighted in a country where nature and art blend without spoiling each other, for nature here is an artist, and art looks like nature. I have found the oasis of which we have dreamed so often after reading certain romances; exuberant wildness subordinated to an effect, nature left to herself without confusion, and even with a suggestion of the wilderness, neglect, mystery; a certain character of its own. Over the barrier with you, and on we go.

"When with curious eyes I tried to look down the whole length of the avenue, which the sun only penetrates at sunrise and sunset, drawing zebra markings of shadow across it when the light is low, my view was cut short by the outline of a bit of rising ground. The avenue makes a detour to avoid it, and, when you have turned the corner, the long row of trees is interrupted again by a little wood; you enter a square with a stone obelisk standing erect in the midst like an eternal note of exclamation. Purple or yellow flowers (according to the time of year) droop from the courses of the masonry, and the monolith itself is surmounted (what a notion!) by a spiked ball. Clearly it was a woman who designed the Aigues, a man does not have such coquettish fancies. The architect acted upon instructions.

"Beyond the little wood, posted there like a sentinel, I came out into a delicious dip of the land, and crossed a foaming stream by a single-span stone bridge covered with mosses of glorious hues, the daintiest of time's mosaics. Then the avenue ascends a gentle slope above the course of the stream, and in the distance you see the first set picture—a mill with its weir and causeway nestled among green trees. There was the thatched roof of the miller's house, the ducks and drying linen, the nets and tackle, and well-boat, to say nothing of the miller's lad, who had been gazing at me before I set eyes on him. Wherever you may be in the country, sure though you feel that you are quite alone, you are the cynosure of some pair of eyes under a cotton night-cap. Some laborer drops his hoe to look at you, some vine-dresser straightens his bent back, some little maid leaves her goats, or cows, or sheep, and scrambles up a near-by willow tree to watch your every movement.

"Before long the elm avenue becomes an alley, shaded by acacias, which brings you to a gate belonging to the period when wrought-iron was twisted into aerial filigree work, not unlike a writing-master's specimen flourishes; this Avenue

gate, as it is called, reveals the taste of the grand dauphin who built it; and if the golden arabesques are somewhat reddened now by the rust beneath, it seemed to me to be none the less picturesque on that account. On either side it is flanked by a porter's lodge, after the manner of the palace at Versailles, each surmounted by a colossal urn. A ha-ha fence, bristling with spikes most formidable to behold, extends for some distance on either side, and when the ha-ha ends a rough unplastered wall begins, a wall of motley-colored stones of the strangest conceivable shapes, imbedded in reddish-colored mortar, the warm yellow of the flints blending with the white chalk and red-brown gritstone.

"At first sight the park looks sombre, for the walls are hidden by climbing plants, and the trees have not heard the sound of an axe for fifty years. You might think that it had become virgin forest again by some strange miracle known to woods alone. The plants that cling about the tree-trunks have bound them together. Glistening mistletoe-berries hang from every fork in the branches where the rain-water can lie. There I have found giant ivy-stems, and such growths as can only exist at a distance of fifty leagues from Paris, where land is not too dear to afford them ample room. It takes a good many square miles to make such a landscape as this. There is no sort of trimness about it, no sign of the garden rake. The ruts are full of water, where the frogs increase and multiply and the tadpoles abide in peace; delicate forest flowers grow there, the heather is as fine as any that I have seen by the hearth in January in Florine's elaborate flower-stand. The mystery of the place mounts to your brain and stirs vague longings. The scent of the forest is adored by all lovers of poetry, for all things in it—the most harmless mosses, the deadliest lurking growths, damp earth, water-willows, and balm and wild thyme, and the yellow stars of the water-lilies, all the teeming vigorous growth of the woods yields itself to me in the breath of the forest and brings me the thought of

them all, perhaps the soul of them all. I fell to thinking of a rose-colored dress flitting along the winding alley.

"It ended abruptly at last in a little wood full of tremulous birches and poplars and their quivering kind, sensitive to the wind, slender-stemmed, graceful of growth, the trees of free love. And then, my dear fellow, I saw a sheet of water covered with pond-lilies, and a light nutshell of a boat, painted black and white, dainty as a Seine waterman's craft, lying rotting among the leaves of the water-plants, broad and spreading, or delicate and fine.

"Beyond the water rises the castle, which bears the date 1560. It is a red brick building with stone facings, string courses and angles, all of stone. The casements (oh! Versailles) still keep their tiny square window-panes. The stone of the string courses is cut into pyramids alternately raised and depressed, as on the Renaissance front of the ducal palace. The castle is a straggling building, with the exception of the main body, which is approached by an imposing double stone staircase ascending in parallel lines and turning half-way up at right angles. The round balusters are flattened at the thickest part and taper toward the bottom. To this main body various turrets have been added, covered with lead in floral designs, and modern wings with balconies and urns more or less in the Grecian style. There is no symmetry about it, my dear fellow. The buildings are dotted down quite promiscuously—nests sheltered, as it were, by a few trees. Their leafage scatters countless brown needles over the roof, a deposit of soil for the moss to grow in, filling the great rifts, which attract the eyes, with plant life. Here there is stone-pine, with rusty red bark and umbrella-shaped top, there a cedar a couple of centuries old, a spruce-fir, or weeping-willows, or an oak-tree rising above these, and (in front of the principal turret) the most outlandish-looking shrubs, clipped yews to set you thinking of some old French plaisance long since swept away, and hortensias and magnolias at their feet; in fact, it is a sort of

horticultural pensioner's hospital, an asylum of nature where trees that have had their day linger on, forgotten like other heroes.

"A quaintly carved chimney at the house angle, puffing out volumes of smoke, assured me that this charming view was no scene on the stage. If there was a kitchen, human beings lived there. Can you imagine me, Blondet, the Parisian who thinks he has come to the Arctic regions when he finds himself at Saint-Cloud, set down in the midst of that torrid zone of Burgundian landscape? The sun beats down in scorching rays, the kingfisher keeps to the brink of the pool, the cicadas chirp, the grasshoppers cry, the seed-vessels of some plant crack here and there, the poppies distill their opiate in thick tears, everything stands out sharp and clear against the dark-blue sky. Joyous fumes of Nature's punch mount up from the reddish earth on the garden terraces; insects and flowers are drunk with the vapor that burns our faces and scorches our eyes. The grapes are rounding, the vines wearing a network of pale threads so fine that it puts laceworkers to the blush; and (a final touch) all along the terrace, in front of the house, blaze the blue larkspurs, nasturtiums the color of flame, and sweet-peas. The scent of tuberose and orange blossoms comes from a distance. The forest fragrance which stirred my imagination prepared me for the pungent perfumes burning in this flower-seraglio.

"Then, at the head of the stone staircase, imagine a woman like a queen of flowers, a woman dressed in white, holding a sunshade lined with white silk above her bare head, a woman whiter than the silk, whiter than the lilies at her feet, or the starry jessamine thrusting itself up boldly through the balustrade before her; a Frenchwoman born in Russia, who says, 'I had quite given you up!' She had seen me ever since the turning in the path. How perfectly any woman, even the simplest of her sex, understands and adapts herself to a situation. The servants were busy preparing breakfast, evidently

delayed till the diligence should arrive. She had not ventured to come to meet me.

"What is this but our dream? the dream of all lovers of Beauty in its many forms—beauty as of seraphs in a Luini's 'Marriage of the Virgin' at Sarono, beauty that a Rubens discovers in the press of the fight in his 'Battle of Thermodon,' beauty that five centuries have elaborated in the cathedrals of Milan and Seville, beauty of Saracen Granada, beauty of a Louis Quatorze's Versailles, beauty of the Alps—beauty of La Limagne?

"Here there is nothing overmuch of prince or financier, but prince of the blood and farmer-general have dwelt at the Aigues, or it would not include two thousand acres of woodland, a park nine hundred acres in extent, the mill, three little holdings, a large farm at Conches, and the vineyards belonging to the estate, which must bring in seventy-two thousand francs every year. Such is the Aigues, dear boy, whither I have come on an invitation of two years' standing, and here I write at this moment in the Blue Chamber—the room kept for intimate friends of the house.

"At the high end of the park there are a dozen springs of clear and limpid water from the Morvan, flowing in liquid ribbons down through the park in the valley, and through the magnificent gardens to pour into the pool. These have given the Aigues its name; Les Aigues-Vives, the living water, it used to be on old title-deeds, in contradistinction to Les Aigues-Mortes, the dead water, but *Vives* has been suppressed. The pool empties itself into the little river that crosses the avenue, through a narrow, willow-fringed channel. The effect of the channel thus decked is charming. As you glide along it in a boat, you might fancy yourself in the nave of some vast cathedral, with the main body of the house at the further end of the channel to represent the choir; and if the sunset sheds its orange hues, barred with shadow, across the front of the castle and lights up the panes, it seems to you that you see the

fiery stained-glass windows. At the end of the channel you see Blangy, the principal village in the commune, which boasts some sixty houses and a country church; or, strictly speaking, this is simply an ordinary house in shocking repair, and distinguished from the rest by a wooden steeple roofed with broken tiles. A decent private house and a parsonage are likewise distinguishable.

"The commune is, for all that, a fairly large one. There are some two hundred scattered hearths in it, beside those in the little market town itself. There are fruit-trees along the wayside, and the land is cut up here and there into gardens, regular laborers' gardens, where everything is crowded into a little space, flowers, and onions, and cabbages, and vines, and gooseberry-bushes, and a great many dung-heaps. The village itself has an unsophisticated air; it looks rustic, with that very tidy simplicity which painters prize so highly. And further away, quite in the distance, you see the little town of Soulanges on the edge of a large sheet of water, like an imitation Lake of Thun.

"When you walk here in the park, with its four gates each in the grand style, you find your Arcadia of mythology grow flat as Beauce. The real Arcadia is in Burgundy, and not in Greece; Arcadia is the Aigues, and nowhere else. The little streams have united to make the river that winds along the lowest grounds of the park, hence the cool stillness peculiar to it, and the appearance of loneliness that puts you in mind of the Chartreuse, an idea carried out by a hermitage on an island contrived in the midst; without, it looks like a ruin in good earnest; within, its elegance is worthy of the taste of the sybarite-financier who planned it.

"The Aigues, my dear fellow, once belonged to that Bouret who spent two millions on a single occasion when Louis XV. came here. How many stormy passions, distinguished intellects, and lucky circumstances have combined to make this beautiful place what it is. One of Henri IV.'s

mistresses rebuilt the present castle, and added the forest to the estate. Then the castle was given to Mlle. Choin, a favorite of the grand dauphin, and she too enlarged the Aigues by several farms. Bouret fitted up the house with all the refinements of luxury to be found in the snug Parisian paradises of operatic celebrities. It was Bouret, too, who restored the ground-floor rooms in the style of Louis XV.

"The dining-hall struck me dumb with wonder. Your eyes are attracted first to the fantastic arabesques of the ceiling, which is covered with frescoes in the Italian manner. Stucco women terminating in leafage bear baskets of fruit, from which the foliage of the ceiling springs. On the wall-spaces between the figures some unknown artists painted wonderful designs, all the glories of the table; salmon and boars' heads, and shell-fish, and every edible thing that by any strange freak of resemblance can recall the human form—man, woman, or child; for whimsicality of invention the designer might rival the Chinese, who, to my thinking, best understand decorative art. A spring is set under the table in the floor by the chair of the mistress of the house, so that she may touch the bell with her foot to summon the servants without interrupting the conversation or disturbing her pose. Paintings of voluptuous scenes are set above the doors. All the embrasures are of marble mosaic, and the hall is warmed from beneath. From every window there is a delightful view.

"The dining-hall communicates with a bathroom on the one hand and a boudoir on the other. The bathroom is lined with Sèvres tiles, painted in monochrome, after Boucher's designs; the floor is paved with mosaic; the bath itself with marble. In an alcove, screened by a painting on copper, raised by means of pulleys and a counterpoise, there is a couch of gilded wood in the very height of the Pompadour style. The lapis blue ceiling is spangled with golden stars. In this way the bath, the table, and the loves are brought together.

"Beyond the salon, in all the glory of the style of Louis XIV., is the splendid billiard-room. I do not know that it has its match in Paris. At the farther end of the semicircular entrance-hall, the finest and daintiest of staircases, lighted from above, leads to the various suites of apartments, built in different centuries. And yet, my dear fellow, they cut off the heads of farmers-general in 1793! Good heavens! why cannot people understand that miracles of art are impossible without great fortunes and lordly lives of secure tranquillity. If the Opposition must needs put kings to death, they might leave us a few petty princes to keep up insignificant great state.

"At the present day these accumulated treasures are in the keeping of a little woman with an artist's temperament. Not content with restoring the place on a large scale, she makes a labor of love of their custody. Philosophers, falsely so called, who are wholly taken up with themselves, while apparently interested in humanity, call these pretty things extravagances. They will swoon away before a spinning-jenny and wax faint with bliss over tiresome modern industrial inventions, as if we of to-day were any greater or any happier than they of the time of Henri IV., of Louis XIV., or Louis XVI., who set their seal upon this castle of the Aigues. What palace, what royal castle, what houses, or works of art, or golden brocaded stuffs, shall *we* leave behind us? We rummage out our grandmothers' petticoats to cover our armchairs. Like knavish and selfish life-tenants, we pull everything down that we may plant cabbages where marvelous palaces stood. But yesterday the plough went over the domain of Persan, whence one of the richest families of the parliament of Paris took its name; Montmorency has fallen under the hammer—Montmorency, on which one of the Italians about Napoleon spent incredible sums; then there is Le Val, the work of Regnaud de Saint-Jean-d'Angély; and Cassan, built by the mistress of a Prince of Conti; four royal dwelling-places in all destroyed quite

lately in the valley of the Oise alone. We are making ready a Roman Campagna about Paris for the morrow of a coming sack, when the storm-wind from the North shall blow upon our plaster villas and pasteboard ornaments and——

"Now, just see, my dear fellow, what comes of the habit of writing journalists' padding. Here am I, rounding off a sort of article for you. Can it be that the mind, like a highway, has its ruts? I will pull myself up at once, for I am robbing them at the office, and robbing myself, and, probably, to make you yawn. There goes the second bell for one of those abundant breakfasts, long fallen into disuse, in the ordinary way, of course, in Parisian houses. You shall have the rest of this to-morrow

"Now for the history of my Arcadia. In 1815 there died at the Aigues one of the most celebrated queans of last century, an opera singer, overlooked by the guillotine, and forgotten by the aristocracy, literature, and finance; intimate as she had been with finance, literature, and the aristocracy (and on a bowing acquaintance with the guillotine), she had fallen into neglect, like many charming old ladies, who expiate the triumphs of youth in the country, and take a new love for a lost love, nature replacing human nature. Such women live with the flowers, the scent of the woods, the open sky, and the light of the sun, with everything that sings, or flutters, or shines, or springs from the earth; birds, or lizards, or blossoms, or grass. They know nothing about these things; they do not seek to explain it, but they have a capacity for loving left in age; and so well do they love, that dukes and marshals, old jealousies and bickerings, and farmers-general, and their follies and luxurious extravagance, and paste gems and diamonds, and rouge and high-heeled pantofles, are all forgotten for the sweets of a country life.

"I am in the possession of valuable information which throws a light on Mlle. Laguerre's later life; for I have felt rather uncomfortable now and again about the old age of such

as Florine, and Mariette, and Suzanne du Val-Noble, and Tullia, just like any child who puzzles his wits to know where all the old moons go.

"Mlle. Laguerre took fright in 1790 at the turn things were taking, and came to settle down at the Aigues, which Bouret had bought for her (he spent several summers here with her). The fate of the du Barry put her in such a quaking that she buried her diamonds. She was only fifty-three years old at the time, and, according to her woman (who has married a gendarme here, a Mme. Soudry, whom they call Madame the Mayoress, a piece of brazen-fronted flattery), 'Madame was handsomer than ever.' Nature, my dear fellow, has her reasons for what she does, no doubt, when she treats these creatures as pet children; debauchery does not kill them; on the contrary, they thrive, and flourish, and renew their youth upon it; lymphatic though they look, they have nerves which sustain their marvelous framework, and bloom perennially from a cause which would make a virtuous woman hideous. Decidedly, fate is not a moral agent.

"Mlle. Laguerre's life here was above reproach, nay, might it not almost be classed with the Lives of the Saints, after that famous adventure of hers? One evening, driven distracted by hopeless love, she fled from the opera in her stage costume, and spent the night in weeping by the roadside out in the fields (how we have slandered love in the time of Louis XV.!). The dawn was so unwonted a sight to her that she sang her sweetest airs to greet it. Some peasants gathered about her, attracted as much by her pose as by her tinsel fripperies, and, amazed by her gestures, her beauty, and her singing, they one and all took her for an angel, and fell upon their knees. But for Voltaire, there would have been another miracle at Bagnolet.

"I know not whether heaven will give much credit to this sinner for her tardy virtue, for a life of pleasure becomes loathsome to one so palled with pleasure as a wanton of the stage of

the time of Louis XV. Mlle. Laguerre was born in 1740. She was in the full bloom of her beauty in 1760, when they nicknamed M. de —— (the name escapes me) *Ministre de la guerre* (Minister of War), on account of his *liaison* with her.

"She changed her name, which was quite unknown in the country, called herself Mme. des Aigues, the better to bury herself in the district, and amused herself by keeping up her estate with extremely artistic taste. When Bonaparte became First Consul, she rounded off her property with some of the church lands, selling her diamonds to buy them; and, as an opera-girl is scarcely fitted to shine in the management of estates, she left the land to her steward, and devoted her personal attention to her park, her fruit-trees, and her flower-garden.

"Mademoiselle being dead and buried at Blangy, the notary from Soulanges (the little place between Ville-aux-Fayes and Blangy) made an exhaustive inventory, and in course of time discovered the famous singer's next-of-kin; she herself knew nothing about them; but eleven families, poor agricultural laborers, living near Amiens, lay down in rags one night and woke up next morning in sheets of gold.

"The Aigues had to be sold, of course, and Montcornet bought it. In various posts in Spain and Pomerania he had managed to save the requisite amount, something like eleven hundred thousand francs. The furniture was included in the purchase. It seems as if the fine place must always belong to some one in the War Department. Doubtless, the general was not insensible to the luxurious influences of his ground-floor apartments, and in talking to the countess yesterday I insisted that the Aigues had determined his marriage.

"If you are to appreciate the countess, my dear fellow, you must know that the general is choleric in temper, sanguine in complexion, and stands five feet nine inches; is round as a barrel, bull-necked, and the owner of a pair of shoulders for which a smith might forge a model cuirass. Montcornet

commanded a company of Cuirassiers at Essling (called by the Austrians Gross-Aspern), and did not lose his life when his magnificent cavalry was pushed back into the Danube. Man and horse managed to cross the river on a huge beam of wood. The Cuirassiers, finding that the bridge was broken, turned like heroes when Montcornet gave the word, and stood their ground against the whole Austrian army. They took up more than thirty cartloads of cuirasses next day on the field, and among themselves the Germans coined a special nickname for the Cuirassiers—those 'men of iron.'*

* I set my face on principle against footnotes; but the present one, the first which I have permitted myself, may be excused on the score of its historical interest. It will show, moreover, that battle scenes have yet to be described in other than the dry technical language of military writers, who, for three thousand years, can speak of nothing but right wings, left wings, and centres more or less routed, but say not a word of the soldier, his heroism, and his hardships. The conscientious manner in which I am setting about the "Scènes de la vie militaire" has meant a series of visits to every battlefield at home or abroad watered by French blood, so I determined to see the field of Wagram. As I reached the bank of the Danube opposite Lobau, I noticed ribbed marks under the soft grass, something like the furrows in a field of luzern, and asked the peasant, our guide, about this new system of agriculture (for so I took it to be). "That is where the Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard are lying," he said; "they are buried under those mounds that you see." The words sent a shiver through me; and Prince Friedrich von Schwartzenberg, who interpreted them, added that this very peasant had driven the train of carts full of the cuirasses of the dead, and that by one of the grotesque accidents of war it was the same man who prepared Napoleon's breakfast on the morning of the battle. Poor though he was, he had kept the double napoleon which the Emperor had given him for his eggs and milk. The curé of Gross-Aspern showed us over the famous cemetery where Frenchmen and Austrians fought in blood half-way to the knee with courage equally obstinate and equally splendid on either side. But there was a marble tablet in the place on which we concentrated our whole attention, the curé explaining how that it was erected to the memory of the owner of Gross-Aspern, killed on the third day of the fight, and that it was the only return made to the family. Then he said, with deep sadness

"Montcornet looks like a hero of ancient times. He has strong muscular arms, a broad, resonant chest, a head striking from its leonine character, and a voice that can sound the command to 'Charge!' above the din of battle; but his is the courage of a sanguine temperament—unreasoning and uncalculating. Montcornet is an awe-inspiring figure at first sight, like many another general whom the soldier's commonsense, the wariness of a man who continually takes his life in his hand, and the habit of command seemingly raise above other men. You take him for a Titan, but he harbors a dwarf in him, like the pasteboard giant who greeted Queen Elizabeth at the gate of Kenilworth Castle. Choleric and kind, full of the pride of the Empire, he has the caustic tongue of a soldier, quick with a word, quicker still with a blow. The man who made so grand a figure on the battlefield becomes unbearable in domestic life, all his ideas of love were learned in the camp, his is that soldiers' love for whom the ancients (ingenious makers of myths) discovered a tutelary deity in Eros—offspring of Mars and Venus. Those delicious religious chron-

in his tones, "That was a time of great misery; a time of great promises; but now to-day is the day of forgetfulness." The words seemed to me to be grandly simple; but when I had thought the matter over, the apparent ingratitude of the House of Austria seemed to me to be justifiable. Neither peoples nor kings are rich enough to reward all the devotion shown in the hour of supreme struggle. Let those who serve a cause with a lurking thought of reward set a price on their blood, and turn *condottieri!* Those who handle sword or pen for their country should think of nothing but how to "play the man," as our forefathers used to say, and accept nothing, not even glory itself, save as a lucky accident.

Three times they stormed that famous cemetery; the third time Masséna made his famous address to his men from the coach-body in which they carried the wounded hero, "You've five sous a day, you blackguards, and I've forty millions, and you let me go in front!" Every one knows the order of the day that the Emperor sent to his lieutenant by M. de Sainte-Croix, who swam the Danube three times, "Die, or take the village again; the existence of the army is at stake! The bridges are broken."—THE AUTHOR.

iclers admit half a score of different Loves. Make a study of the paternity and attributes of each, and you will provide yourself with a social nomenclature of the completest kind. We imagine that we invent this or that, do we? When the globe, like a dreaming sick man, turns again through another cycle and our continents become oceans, the Frenchman of the coming time will find a steam-engine, a cannon, a copy of a daily paper, and a charter lying wrapped about with weeds at the bottom of our present Atlantic.

"Now, the countess, my dear boy, is a little woman, fragile and delicate and timid. What say you to this marriage? Any one who knows the world, knows that this sort of thing happens so often that a well-assorted marriage is an exception. I came here to see how this tiny, slender woman holds the leading strings; for she has this huge, tall, square-built general of hers quite as well in hand as ever he kept his Cuirassiers.

"If Montcornet raises his voice before his Virginie, madame lays her finger on her lips, and he holds his tongue. The old soldier goes to smoke his pipe or cigar in a summer-house fifty paces away from the castle, and perfumes himself before he comes back. He is proud of his subjection. If anything is suggested, he turns to her, like a bear infatuated for grapes, with 'That is as madame pleases.' He comes to his wife's room, the paved floor creaking like boards under his heavy tread; and if she cries in a startled voice, 'Do not come in!' he describes a right wheel in military fashion, meekly remarking, 'You will let me know when I may come and speak to you,' and this from the voice that roared to his Cuirassiers on the banks of the Danube, 'Boys, there is nothing for it but to die, and to die handsomely, since there is nothing else to be done!' A touching little thing I once heard him say of his wife, 'I not only love her, I reverence her.' Sometimes, in one of his fits of rage, when his wrath knows no bounds and pours out in torrents that carry all before it, the little woman

goes to her room and leaves him to storm. But four or five days later she will say, 'Don't put yourself in a passion, you will break a bloodvessel on your lungs, to say nothing of the pain it gives me,' and the Lion of Essling takes to flight to dry the tears in his eyes. If he comes into the salon when we are deep in conversation, 'Leave us,' she says, 'he is reading something to me,' and the general goes.

"None but strong men, great-natured and hot-tempered, among these thunderbolts of battle, diplomates with Olympian brows and men of genius, are capable of these courses of confidence, of generosity for weakness, of constant protection and love without jealousy, of this *bonhomie* with a woman. Faith! I rate the countess' science as far above crabbed and peevish virtues as the satin of a settee above the Utrecht velvet of a dingy back-parlor sofa.

"Six days have I spent in this admirable country, dear fellow, and I am not tired yet of admiring the wonders of this park-land with the dark forests rising above it, and the paths beside the streams. Everything here fascinates me—nature, and the stillness of nature, quiet enjoyment, the easy life which nature offers. Ah! here is real literature, there are never defects of style in a meadow; and complete happiness would be complete forgetfulness even of the 'Débats.'

"You ought not to need to be told that we have had two wet mornings. While the countess slept, and Montcornet tramped over his property, driven to keep the promise so rashly given, I have been writing to you.

"Hitherto, though I was born in Alençon, the son of an old justice and a prefect (if what they tell me is true), though I am something of a judge of grass-land, I had heard of such things as estates that brought in four or five thousand francs a month, but I regarded these as idle tales. Money, for me, has but four hideous convertible terms—work, booksellers, journalism, and politics. When shall *we* have an estate where money grows out of the earth, in some pretty place in the

country. That is what I wish you in the name of the theatre, the press, and literature. Amen!

"How Florine will envy the lamented Mlle. Laguerre! Our modern Bourets have lost the old French lordly instinct which taught them how to live; they will club three together to take a box at the opera and go shares in a pleasure; no longer do they cut down magnificently bound quartos to match the octavos on their shelves. It is as much as they will do to buy a book in paper-covers. What are we coming to? Good-by, children; keep your benign Blondet in loving remembrance."

If this letter, which dropped from the idlest pen in France, had not been preserved by a miraculous chance, it would be all but impossible now to describe the Aigues as it used to be, and without this description the twice tragical tale of the events which took place there would, perhaps, be less interesting.

Plenty of people expect, no doubt, to see the general's cuirass lighted up by a lightning flash, to see his wrath kindled, his fury descend like a waterspout on this little woman; in fact, to find the usual curtain scene of modern drama—a tragedy in a bedroom. How should this modern tragedy develop itself in the pretty salon beyond the bluish enameled doorways, garrulous with their mythological loves? Strange bright birds were painted over the ceiling and the shutters; china monsters were splitting their sides with laughter on the mantel-shelf; the blue dragons played on the rich vases, twisting their tails in spiral scrolls along the rim which some Japanese artist enameled with a maze of color to please his fancy, and the very chairs, lounges, sofas, console tables, and stands dwelt in an atmosphere of contemplative idleness enervating to body and mind. No; this tragedy extends beyond the sphere of domestic life, it is played out upon a higher or a lower stage. Do not look for passion here; the bare truth will be only too dramatic. And the

historian, moreover, should never forget that it is his duty to allot to each his part; that the rich and the poor are equal before his pen; and for him the figure of the peasant has the greatness of his miseries, the rich man the pettiness of his absurdities. After all, the rich have passions, the peasant knows nothing beyond natural cravings, and, therefore, the peasant's lot is doubly poor; and if it is a political necessity that his aggressions should be sternly checked, from a human and religious point of view he should be treated reverently.

II.

A BUCOLIC OVERLOOKED BY VIRGIL.

When a Parisian drops down into some country place and finds himself cut off from all his accustomed ways, he soon finds time hang heavily on his hands in spite of the utmost ingenuity on the part of his entertainers. Indeed, your host and hostess being aware that the pleasures of a *tete-a-tete* (by nature fugitive) cannot endure for ever, will tell you placidly that "you will find it very dull here;" and, in fact, any one who wishes to know the delights of a life in the country must have some interest to keep him in the country, must know its toils and the alternations of pain and pleasure that make up harmony—the eternal symbol of human life.

When the visitor has recovered from the effects of the journey, made up arrears of slumber, and has fallen in with country ways of life, a Parisian who is neither a sportsman nor a farmer, and wears thin walking shoes, is apt to discover that the early morning hours pass slowest of all. The women are still asleep or at their toilets, and invisible until breakfast time; the master of the house went out early to see after his affairs; and from eight o'clock till eleven, therefore (for in nearly all castles they breakfast at that hour), a Parisian is left to his own society. He seeks amusement in the small details

of his toilet, a short-lived expedient; and unless a man of letters has brought down with him some bit of work (which he finds impossible to do, and takes back to town untouched, and with no added knowledge of it save of the difficulties at the outset), he is reduced to pace the alleys in the park, to gape and gaze and count the tree-trunks. The easier a life is, the more irksome it grows, unless you happen to belong to the Shaker community or to the worshipful company of amateur carpenters or bird-stuffers.

If, like the landowners, you were to remain in the country for the rest of your days, you would provide your tedium with some hobby—geological, mineralogical, botanical, or what not; but no sensible man will contract a vice that may last through his life for the sake of killing time for a fortnight. The most magnificent country-house soon becomes wearisome to those who own nothing of it but the view; the beauties of nature seem very paltry compared with the theatrical representations of them, and Parisian life sparkles from every facet. If a man is not under the particular spell which keeps him attached (like Blondet) to spots honored by *her* footsteps and lighted by *her* eyes, he is fit to envy the birds their wings, that so he may return to the ceaseless and thrilling dramatic spectacle of Paris and its harrowing struggles for existence.

From the length of the journalist's letter, any shrewd observer should guess that the writer had mentally and physically reached that peculiar phase of repletion consequent on satisfied desire and glut of happiness, which is perfectly illustrated by the state of the domestic goose, when, fattened by force, with head declining upon a too protuberant crop, the victim stands planted on both feet, unable and unwilling to give so much as a glance to the most tempting morsel. When, therefore, Blondet had finished his formidable letter, he felt a longing to go beyond the bounds of this Armida's garden, to find anything to enliven the deadly dullness of the early hours of

the day, for between breakfast and dinner he spent his time with his hostess, who knew how to make it pass quickly.

Mme. de Montcornet had kept a clever man a whole month in the country, and had not seen the feigned smile of satiety on his face, nor detected the incipient yawn of boredom which can never be concealed. This is one of a woman's greatest triumphs. An affection proof against such tests should last for ever. Why women do not put their lovers on a trial, which neither fool nor egoist nor narrow nature can abide, is utterly incomprehensible. Philip II. himself, that Alexander of dissimulation, would have begun to blab his secrets after a month's *tete-a-tete* in the country. For which reason kings spend their lives in a perpetual bustle and racket, and never allow anybody to see them for more than a quarter of an hour at a time.

Yet, notwithstanding the delicate attentions of one of the most charming women in Paris, Emile Blondet played truant with a relish long forgotten. The day when his letter was finished he told Francois (the head-servant, specially appointed to wait upon him) to call him early. He had made up his mind to explore the valley of the Avonne.

The Avonne at its head is a small river. Many streams that rise round about the Aigues go to swell it below Conches, and at Ville-aux-Fayes it joins one of the largest affluents of the Seine. The Avonne is navigable for rafts for four leagues; Jean Rouvet's invention has given all their commercial value to the forests of Aigues, Soulanges, and Ronquerolles, on the heights above the picturesque river. The park of the Aigues takes up most of the valley between the river that flows below the wooded heights on either side, called the Forest of the Aigues, and the king's highway, mapped out on the horizon by a line of old warped elm-trees running parallel with the hills (so called) of the Avonne, the lowest steps of the grand amphitheatre of the Morvan.

To use a homely metaphor, the shape of the park was some-

thing like a huge fish lying in the valley bottom, with the head at Conches and the tail at Blangy, the length much exceeding the breadth, and the broadest part in the middle full five times the width of the valley at Blangy, or six times the width at Conches. Possibly the lay of the land, thus set among three villages (Soulanges, whence you plunge down into this Eden, being but a league away), may have assisted to foment discord, and suggested the excesses which form the chief subject of this scene; for if passing travelers look down on the paradise of the Aigues from Ville-aux-Fayes with envious eyes, how should the well-to-do townsfolk of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes feel less covetous when they behold it every day of their lives?

This last bit of topographical detail is needed if the position is to be understood, as well as the why and wherefore of four park gates at the Aigues; for the whole park was shut in by walls, save where a ha-ha fence had been substituted for the sake of the view. The four gates, called respectively the Conches gate, the Avonne, the Avenue, and Blangy gates, were so full of the character of the different times in which they were built, that they shall be described in their place for the benefit of archæologists; but the subject shall receive the concise treatment which Blondet gave to the avenue itself.

For a week the illustrious editor of the "Journal des Débats" had taken his walks abroad with the countess, until he knew by heart the Chinese pavilion, bridges, islands, kiosks, hermitage, chalet, ruined temple, Babylonish ice-house; in short, all the ins and outs of the gardens planned by an architect with nine hundred acres at his disposal. Now, therefore, he felt inclined to trace the course of the Avonne, which his host and hostess daily praised to him. Every evening he had planned the excursion, every morning he forgot all about it. And, indeed, above the park the Avonne is like an Alpine torrent, hollowing out its rocky bed, and fash-

ioning deep pools, where it sinks underground. Here and there is a waterfall, when some little stream unexpectedly splashes into it; here and there it broadens out like a miniature Loire and ripples over sandy shallows, but it is a stream so changeful in its moods that rafts are out of the question. Blondet struck up through the park by the shortest way to the Conches gate, which deserves a few words of description, if only for the sake of the historical associations connected with the property.

The founder of the Aigues was a cadet of the house of Soulanges, who married an heiress, and was minded to snap his fingers at his oldest brother, an amiable sentiment to which we also owe the Isola-Bella, the fairyland on Lake Maggiore. In the Middle Ages the castle of the Aigues stood beside the Avonne; but of the whole stronghold only one gateway remained, a porched gateway of the kind usual in fortified towns, with a pepper-box turret on either side of it. The ponderous masonry above the arch was gay with wall-flowers, and pierced by three great mullion windows. A spiral staircase had been contrived to give access to two dwelling-rooms in the first turret, and to a kitchen in the second. On the roof ridge of the porch, steep-pitched, like all such constructions in the olden time, stood a couple of weather-cocks, adorned with quaint ironwork. Not many places can boast of a town hall so imposing.

The escutcheon of the Soulanges family was still visible on the keystone of the arch of a hard stone selected for its purpose by the craftsman whose chisel had engraven the arms of Soulanges—*azure, three palmer's staves per pale argent, five crosslets fitchy sable on a fess gules over all*, differenced by a mark of cadency. Blondet spelt out the device *Je soule agir* —It is my wont to act—a bit of word-play such as crusaders loved to make on their names, and an excellent maxim which Montcornet to his sorrow neglected, as shall be seen. The heavy, old wooden door was heavier yet by reason of the iron

studs arranged in groups of five upon it. A pretty girl opened it for Blondet; and a keeper, awakened by the groaning of the hinges, put his head out of the window. The man was in his night-shirt.

"What is this? Our keepers are still abed at this time of day, are they?" thought the Parisian, who imagined that he knew all about forest customs.

With a quarter of an hour's walk he reached the springs of the river, and from the upper end of the valley at Conches the whole enchanting view lay before his eyes. A description of that landscape, like the history of France, might fill a thousand volumes, or could be condensed into a single book. Let a couple of phrases suffice.

Picture a bulging mass of rock, covered with the velvet of dwarf shrubs, placed so that it looks like some huge tortoise set across the Avonne which wears its way out at the foot, a rock that describes an arch through which you behold a little sheet of water, clear as a mirror, where Avonne seems to sleep before it breaks in waterfalls over the huge boulders where the dwarf willows, supple as springs, perpetually yield to the force of the current, only to fly back again.

Up above the waterfalls the hillsides are cut sharply away, like some Rhineland crag clad with mosses and heather; they are rifted, too, like the Rhine crag, by strata of schist, where springs of white water bubble out here and there, each one above a little space of grass, always fresh and green, which serves as a cup for the spring; and finally, by way of contrast to the wild solitude of nature, you see the outposts of civilization: Conches, and the gardens on the edge of the fields, and beyond the picturesque wilderness the assembled roofs of the village and the church spire.

Behold the two phrases! But the sunrise, the pure air, the dew crystals, the blended music of woods and water, these must be divined!

"Faith, it is nearly as fine as the opera!" said Blondet to

himself, as he clambered up the torrent bed of the Avonne. The caprices of the higher stream brought out all the depth, stillness, and straightness of the Avonne in the valley, shut in by tall trees and the forest of the Aigues. He did not, however, pursue his morning walk very far. He was soon brought to a stand by a peasant, one of the subordinate characters so necessary to the action of this drama that it is doubtful whether they or the principal characters play the more important parts.

Blondet, that clever writer, reached a boulder-strewn spot, where the main stream was pent as if between two doors, when he saw the man standing so motionless that his journalist's curiosity would have been aroused, even if the figure and clothing of the living statue had not already puzzled him not a little.

In that poverty-stricken figure he saw an old man such as Charlet loved to draw; the strongly built frame, schooled to endure hardship, might have belonged to one of the troopers depicted by the soldier's Homer; the rugged, purplish-red countenance gave him kinship with Charlet's immortal scavengers, unschooled by resignation. An almost bald head was protected from the inclemency of the weather by a coarse felt hat, the brim stitched to the crown here and there, and from under the hat one or two locks of hair straggled out; an artist would have given four francs an hour for the chance of studying from the life that dazzling snow, arranged after the fashion of the Eternal Father of classic art. Yet there was something in the way in which the cheeks sank in, continuing the lines of the mouth, that plainly said that this toothless old person went more often to the barrel than to the bread-pan. The short, white bristles of a scanty beard gave an expression of menace to his face. A pair of little eyes, oblique as a pig's and too small for his huge countenance, suggested a combination of sloth and cunning; but at that moment, as he pored upon the river, fire seemed to flash from them.

For all clothing the poor man wore a blouse, which had been blue in former times, and a pair of trousers of the coarse canvas that they use in Paris for packing material. Any town-dweller would have shuddered at the sight of his broken sabots, without so much as a little straw by way of padding in the cracks. As for the blouse and trousers, they had reached the stage when a textile fabric is fit for nothing but the pulping-trough of a paper-mill.

Blondet, as he gazed at the rustic Diogenes, was convinced that the typical peasant of old tapestry, old pictures, and carvings was not, as he had hitherto imagined, a purely fancy portrait. Nor did he utterly condemn, as heretofore, the productions of the School of Ugliness; he began to see that in man the beautiful is but a gratifying exception to a general rule, a chimerical vision in which he struggles to believe.

"I wonder what the ideas and manner of life of such a human being may be! What is he thinking about?" Blondet asked himself, and curiosity seized upon him. "Is that my fellow-man? We have only our human shape in common, and yet——"

He looked at the hard tissues peculiar to those who lead an out-of-door life, accustomed to all weathers, and to excessive heat and cold, and to hardships, in fact, of every kind, a training which turns the skin to something like tanned leather, and makes the sinews well-nigh pain-proof, like those of the Arabs or Cossacks.

"That is one of Fenimore Cooper's redskins," said Blondet to himself; "there is no need to go to America to study the savage."

The Parisian was not two paces away, but the old man did not look round; he stood and stared at the opposite bank with the fixity that glazes a Hindoo fakir's eyes and induces anchylosis of every joint. This kind of magnetism is more infectious than people think; it was too much for Blondet, he, too, began at last to stare into the water.

A good quarter of an hour went by in this way, and Blondet still found no sufficient motive for the proceeding. "Well, my good man," he asked, "what is there over yonder?"

"Hush-sh!" the other said, with a sign to Blondet that he must not disturb the air with his voice. "You will scare her——"

"Who?"

"An otter, mister. If her hears us, her's just the one to give we the slip and get away under water. There ain't no need to say that her jumped in there. There! Do you see the water a-bubbling up? Oh, her's lying in wait for a fish; but when her tries to come out, my boy will catch hold of her. It's like this, you see, an otter is the rarest thing. It is a scientific animal to catch, fine and delicate eating, all the same; they will give me ten francs for it at the Aigues, seeing as the lady there doesn't eat meat of a Friday, and to-morrow is Friday. Time was when the lady that's dead and gone has paid me as much as twenty francs for one, and her would let me have the skin back, too! Mouche," he called in a loud whisper, "keep a good lookout——"

On the other side of this branch stream of the Avonne, Blondet saw a pair of eyes gleaming like a cat's eyes from under a clump of alders; then he made out the brown forehead and shock-head of a boy of twelve or thereabouts, who was lying there flat on his stomach; the urchin pointed out the otter, with a sign which indicated that he was keeping the animal in view. The consuming anxiety of the old man and the child got the better of Blondet; he fell a willing victim to the devouring demon of Sport.

Now that demon has two claws, called hope and curiosity, by which he leads you whither he will.

"You sell the skin to the hatters," the old man went on. "So fine it is and soft. They make caps of it——"

"Do you believe that, my good man?"

"Of course, mister, you ought to know a lot more about

it than I do, for all I am seventy years old," said the old person meekly and respectfully; then, with unctuous insinuation—"and you can tell me, no doubt, why coach-guards and innkeepers think such a lot of it, sir?"

Blondet, that master of irony, had his suspicions; the word "scientific" had not escaped him; he remembered the Maréchal de Richelieu, and fancied that this old rustic was laughing at him, but the simplicity of the man's manner and stupid expression dismissed the idea.

"There were plenty of otters to be seen hereabouts when I was young, the country suits them," the good soul went on; "but they have hunted them down so much, that if we see a tail of one on 'em once in seven years, it is the most you will do. There's the *sub-perfect* over at Ville-aux-Fayes—you know him, mister? He is a nice young man, like you, for all he is a Parisian, and he is fond of curiosities. So, knowing that I was good at catching otters, for I know them as well as ever you know your alphabet, he just says to me like this, 'Father Fourchon, when you find an otter, you bring it to me,' says he, 'and I'll pay you well for it; and if her should have white dots on her back,' he says, 'I would give you thirty francs for her.' That's what he says to me on the quay at Ville-aux-Fayes, and that's the truth; true as I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. There is another learned man over at Soulanges, Monsieur Gourdon, our doctor he is, they say he is making a cabinet of natural history; there is not his like in Dijon, he is the learnedest man in these parts in fact, and he would give me a good price for her! He knows how to stuff man and beast! And there's my boy here stands me out that this one is white *all over!* 'If that is so,' I says to him, 'the Lord A'mighty have borne us in mind this morning!' Look at the water a-bubbling, do you see? Oh! her's there. Her lives in a kind of a burrow on land, but, for all that, her'll stop under water whole days together. Ah! her heard you, mister, her

is suspicious, for there ain't no animile cleverer than that one; her is worse than a woman."

"Perhaps that is why the otter is called *her*," suggested Blondet.

"Lord, mister, being from Paris as you are, you know better about it than we do. But you would have done us a better turn by lying a-bed of a morning, because—do you see that ripple-like over yonder? Her's getting away underneath. Come along, Mouche! Her has heard the gentleman, her has, and her is just the one to keep us here cooling our heels till midnight; let us be going. There's our thirty francs swimming away."

Mouche got up, but wistfully. He was a touzle-headed youth, with a brown face, like an angel's in some fifteenth century picture. To all intents and purposes, he wore breeches, for his trousers ended at the knee in a jagged fringe ornamented with thorns and dead leaves. This indispensable garment was secured to his person by a couple of strands of tow by way of braces, and a shirt of sacking (originally of the same pattern as his grandsire's trousers, but thickened by raw-edged patches) left a sunburned chest exposed to view. In the matter of simplicity Mouche's clothes marked a distinct advance on old Fourchon's costume.

"What good, simple souls they are out here!" said Blondet to himself. "Round about Paris the work-people would cut up rough if a swell came and spoiled sport." And as he had never set eyes on an otter, not even in the museum, he was quite delighted with this episode in his walk.

"Come, now," he began, feeling touched, for the old man was going away without asking for anything, "you say that you are an expert otter-hunter. If you are sure that the otter is there——"

Mouche, on the opposite bank, pointed to the air-bubbles rising to the surface of the Avonne, to die away in eddies in the middle of the pool.

"Her has gone back again," said old Fourchon; "her has been to draw a breath of air, the slut! It is her as has made that fuss there. How do her manage to breathe under water? But the thing's so cunning, it laughs at science."

"Very well," said Blondet, deciding that the last pleasantry was a current bucolic witticism and no product of the brain of the individual before him; "stop and catch the otter."

"And how about our day's work, mine and Mouche's?"

"What is a day's work?"

"For the two of us, me and my apprentice? Five francs——" said the old man, looking Blondet in the eyes with a hesitation which plainly said that this was a prodigious overstatement.

The journalist took some coins from his pocket, saying, "Here are ten francs for you, and you shall have at least as much again for the otter."

"Her'll be cheap to you at that, if her has white dots on her back, for the *sub-perfect* told me that our museum has only one of that sort. And he knows a good deal, all the same, does our *sub-perfect*, he is no fool. If I goes after otters, Master des Lupeaulx is after Master Gaubertin's daughter, who has a fine white *dot* (portion) on her back. Stay, mister, no offense to you, but you go and beat up the water by that stone yonder in the Avonne. When we have driven out the otter, her will come down with the stream, for that is a trick the animals have; them'll go up stream to fish, and when they have as much as they can carry, they come down to their burrow; they know it's easier going down stream. Didn't I tell you that they are cunning! If I had learned cunning in their school, I should be living like a gentleman at this day. I found out too late that you have to get up early in the morning to make headway up stream and get the first chance at the booty. There was a spell cast over me when I was born, in fact. Perhaps the three of us together will be too clever for the otter."

"And how, old necromancer?"

"Lord, sir, we peasants are such stupid animals ourselves, that we come at last to understand the animals. This is what we will do. When the otter turns to go home, we will scare her here, and you will scare her there, and scared of both sides, her'll make a dash for the bank. If her takes to the land, it is all over with her. The thing can't walk, it's made to swim, with its goose-feet. Oh! you will have some fun, for it is a regular double game—you fish and hunt at the same time. The general at the Aigues, where you are staying, came back three times running, he took such a fancy to the sport."

Blondet obediently hopped from stone to stone till he reached the middle of the Avonne, where he took his stand, duly provided with a green branch, which the old otter-hunter cut for him, ready to whip the stream at the word of command.

"Yes, just there, mister," and there Blondet remained, unconscious of the flight of time, for every moment the old man's gestures kept him on the lookout for a successful issue, and time never passes more quickly than when every faculty is on the alert in expectation of energetic action to succeed to the profound silence of lying in wait.

"Daddy Fourchon," the boy whispered, when he was alone with the old man, "there really be an otter there——"

"Do you see her?"

"There her is!"

The old man was dumfounded. He distinctly saw the brown skin of an otter swimming along under the water.

"Her is coming along tow'rds me," said the little fellow.

"Fetch her a slap on the head, and jump in and hold her down at the bottom, and don't let her go——"

Mouche dived into the Avonne like a scared frog.

"Quick, quick! mister," old Fourchon shouted, as he likewise jumped into the Avonne (leaving his sabots on the bank).

"Just give her a scare! There! look—her is swimming tow'rds you!"

The old man splashed along through the water to Blondet, shouting with the gravity that rustics can preserve through the keenest sense of fun.

"Look, do you see her, along of those rocks!"

Blondet, purposely placed so that the sun shone into his eyes, thrashed the water in all good faith.

"There! there! nearer the rocks!" shouted old Fourchon, "that is where her hole is to your left." Carried away by vexation, excited by the long suspense, Blondet took an impromptu footpath, slipping off the stones into the water.

"Hold on! hold on! mister, you have got her. Oh, heaven and earth! there she goes, right between your legs! Her is off! Her is off!" cried the old man in desperation. And like one possessed with the fury of the chase, he splashed across till he confronted Blondet.

"'Twas your doing that we lost her," old Fourchon continued; Blondet held out a hand, and he emerged from the water like a Triton—a vanquished Triton. "Her is there under the rock, the wench! Her dropped her fish," he added, pointing to something floating down the stream some distance away. "Anyhow we shall have the tench, for a tench it is——"

As he spoke they saw a liveried servant on horseback, galloping along the Conches road, holding a second horse by the bridle.

"There! it looks as if the servants from the castle were looking for you," he went on. "If you want to get back across the river, I will lend you a hand. Oh! I would as soon have a soaking as not, it saves you the trouble of washing your things."

"And how about catching cold?" asked Blondet.

"Ah, indeed! Don't you see that the sun has browned our shanks like an old pensioner's tobacco pipe. Lean on

me, mister. You are from Paris, you don't know how to get foothold on our rocks, for so many things as you know. If you stop here a while, you will learn a sight of things out of the book of nature, you that write the news in the papers."

Blondet, arrived on the opposite bank, encountered the footman Charles.

"Ah, sir," cried the man, "you cannot imagine madame's anxiety when she heard that you had gone out through the Conches gate. She thinks that you are drowned. Three times they rang the second bell for breakfast with might and main, after shouting all over the park, and Monsieur le Curé is still looking for you there."

"Why, what time is it, Charles?"

"A quarter to twelve——!"

"Help me to mount——"

"Perhaps monsieur has been helping to hunt old Fourchon's otter," said the man, as he noticed the water dripping from Blondet's boots and trousers.

That question opened the journalist's eyes.

"Not a word about it, Charles, and I will bear you in mind," cried he.

"Oh, Lord love you, sir, Monsieur le Comte himself was taken in with old Fourchon's otter. As soon as any one new to the place comes to the Aigues, old Fourchon is on the lookout for him; and if the town gentleman goes to see the springs of the Avonne, the old boy sells him his otter. He keeps it up so well, that the comte went back three times and paid him six days' wages while they sat and watched the water flow."

"And I used to think that I had seen the greatest comedians of the day in Potier and the younger Baptiste," said Blondet to himself, "and what are they compared with this beggar?"

"Oh! he is quite up to that game, is old Fourchon," Charles pursued. "And he has another string to his bow,

for he had himself put down on the register as a rope-maker. He has his rope-walk along the wall outside the Blangy gate. If you take it into your head to meddle with his cord, he comes round you so cleverly that you begin to want to turn the wheel and make a bit of rope yourself, and then he asks you for a prentice's premium. Madame was caught that way and gave him twenty francs. He is the king of sly-boots," said Charles, picking his words.

The man's gossip gave Blondet some opportunity of reflecting upon the profound astuteness of the peasantry; he also recalled much that had been said by his father the judge at Alençon. Then as all the malice lurking beneath old Fourchon's simplicity came up in his mind, Charles' confidences put those remarks in a new light; and he confessed to himself that he had been gulled by the old Burgundian beggar.

"You would not believe, sir, how wide awake you have to be in the country, and here of all places, for the general is not very popular——"

"Why so?"

"Lord, I do not know," said Charles, with the stupid look a servant can assume to screen a refusal to his betters, a look which gave Blondet plenty of food for reflection.

"So here you are, runaway!" said the general, coming out upon the steps at the sound of horse-hoofs. "Here he is! Set your mind at rest," he called to his wife, hearing her pattering footsteps. "Now we are all here but the Abbé Brossette. Go and look for him, Charles," he said, turning to the servant.

III.

THE TAVERN.

The Blangy gate dated from Bouret's time. It consisted of two pilasters with "rustic" bossages, each surmounted by a rampant greyhound holding an escutcheon between its fore-

paws. The steward's house was so close to the gate that the great financier had no occasion to build another for a lodge-keeper. An imposing iron grating, of the same style as those made in Buffon's time for the Jardin des Plantes, opened out upon the extreme end of the paved way which led to the cross-road. Formerly the Aigues had combined with the House of Soulanges to maintain this local road which connected Conches and Cerneux and Blangy and Soulanges with Ville-aux-Fayes, as by a flowery chain, so many are the little houses, covered with roses and honeysuckle and climbing plants, that are dotted about among the hedge-inclosed domains along its course.

Just outside, along a trim wall, stood a rotten post, a ramshackle wheel and heckle-boards, the entire "plant" of a village rope-maker. Farther, the wall gave place to a ha-ha fence, so that the castle commanded a view of the valley as far as Soulanges, and even farther.

About half-past twelve o'clock, while Blondet was taking his place at table opposite the Abbé Brossette, and receiving a flattering scolding from the countess, old Fourchon and Mouche arrived at their rope-walk. Under pretext of making rope, old Fourchon could keep an eye upon the house and spy the movements of the gentry. Indeed, a shutter could not move, no two persons could stroll away together, no trifling incident could take place at the castle but the old man knew of it. He had only taken up his position there within the last three years, and neither keepers, nor servants, nor the family had noticed a circumstance so apparently insignificant.

"Go round to the Avonne gate while I put up our tackle," said old Fourchon; "and when you have chattered about this, they will come to look for me at the Grand-I-Vert. I will have a drop of something there; it is thirsty work stepping in the water like that. If you do just as I have been telling you, you will get a good breakfast out of them; try to speak with the countess, and go on about me, so that they may

take it into their heads to give me a sermon, eh! There will be a glass or two of good wine to tipple down."

With these final instructions, which, to judge from Mouche's sly looks, were almost superfluous, the old rope-maker tucked his otter under his arm and disappeared down the road.

Half-way between this picturesque gateway and the village, at the time of Emile Blondet's visit, stood a house such as may be seen anywhere in France in districts where stone is scarce. Brickbats collected from all sources, and great flints roughly set in stiff clay, made fairly solid walls, though the weather had eaten them away. Stout tree boughs upheld a roof thatched with straw and rushes; the clumsy shutters and the door, like everything else about the hovel, were either lucky "finds" or had been extorted by hard begging.

The peasant brings to the making of his dwelling the same instinct that a wild creature displays in the making of its nest or burrow; this instinct shone conspicuously in the arrangements of the whole cabin. To begin with, the door and window were on the north side, and the house, situated on a little knoll in the stoniest part of a vineyard, should have been healthy enough. It was reached by three steps, ingeniously contrived out of stakes and planks, and filled in with small stones. The rain-water very soon flowed away; and as in Burgundy rain seldom comes from the north, the foundations, flimsy though they were, did not rot with the damp. At the foot of the steps some rustic palings extended along the footpath, until they were lost to sight in a hedge of hawthorn and wildbriar. A collection of rough benches and rickety tables invited passers-by to seat themselves in the shade of the trellised vine which covered the whole space between the hut and the road. In the inclosed garden, on the top of the knoll, grew roses, and pinks, and violets, and all the flowers which cost nothing; honeysuckle and jessamine trails clung about a roof heavy already with moss, in spite of its recent date.

The owner had set up a "lean-to" cowshed against the

right wall of the house. It was a crazy wooden erection, with a sort of yard of beaten earth in front of it, where a huge dung-hill stood conspicuous in one corner. An outhouse at the back, a thatched roof, supported by two tree-trunks, did duty as a shed for vine-dressers' tools, empty casks, and heaps of faggots piled about the projecting boss of the oven, which in peasants' cottages almost invariably opens just under the chimney-shelf.

About an acre of land belonged to the house, a croft inclosed with a privet hedge, full of vines, tended as a peasant's vines are tended, so well manured, layered, and trenched, that they came into leaf earlier than any others for three leagues around. The slender tops of a few fruit-trees, almonds, and plums, and apricots, appeared here and there above the hedge. Potatoes or beans were usually growing among the vine-stems. Another small wedge-shaped bit of land behind the yard and in the direction of the village was low and damp enough to grow the cabbages and onions dear to the laborer. A latticed gate divided it off from the yard, through which the cows passed, trampling and manuring the earth.

Inside the house, the two rooms on the first floor opened on to the vineyard; on that side of it, a rough wooden staircase ran up the outer wall under the thatch to a garret lighted by a round window under the roof. Beneath these rustic steps a cellar, built of Burgundian bricks, contained a few hogsheads of wine.

A peasant's *batterie de cuisine* (tin cooking utensils) usually consists of a couple of cooking-pots, a frying-pan, and an iron kettle; but in this cottage, by way of exception to the rule, there were two huge saucepans hanging up under the mantel-shelf above a small portable stove. But, in spite of this sign of comfort, the furniture generally was in keeping with the outside of the house. An earthen jar held the water; pewter spoons and wooden ladles did duty for silver-plate;

and the crockery-ware was cracked, riveted, brown without and white within. A few deal chairs stood about a solid table, and the floor was of beaten earth. The walls were whitewashed once in five years, so were the slender rafters of the ceiling, where bacon and ropes of onions, and bunches of candles, hung among the bags in which the peasant keeps his seeds. Beside the bread-hutch stood an old cupboard of black walnut-wood, containing such linen as the inmates of the cabin possessed—the spare garments and the Sunday clothes of the whole family.

An antiquated gun shone on the wall above the mantel-shelf, a poacher's weapon, for which you would not have given five francs. The gun-stock was almost charred, nor was there any appearance about the barrel, which looked as if it was never cleaned. Perhaps you may think that as the gate stood open day and night, and the cabin-door boasted no fastening but a latch, nothing more efficient in the way of firearms was needed, and ask what earthly use such a weapon might be. But, in the first place, rough though the woodwork was, the barrel had been carefully selected ; it had belonged to a gun of price, once given, no doubt, to some gamekeeper. And the owner of the gun never missed a shot ; between him and his weapon there was the intimate understanding that exists between the craftsman and his tool. If the muzzle must be pointed a millimetre above or below the mark, the poacher knows and obeys the rule accurately, and is never out in his reckoning. And an officer of artillery would see that all the essentials were in good working order, nor more nor less. Into everything that the peasant appropriates to his uses he puts the exact amount of energy required to attain the desired end—the necessary labor, and nothing more. He has not the least idea of finish, but he is a perfect judge of the necessities in everything ; he knows all the degrees in the scale of energy ; and if he works for a master, knows exactly how to do the least possible amount of work for the utmost possible

pay. Finally, this very gun played an important part in the family life, as shall presently be shown.

Have you realized all the countless details about this hovel, five hundred paces from the picturesque park gates? Can you picture it squatting there like a beggar by a palace wall? Well, then, beneath all its idyllic rusticity, the velvet mosses of its roof, the cackling hens, the wallowing pig, the lowing heifer, and every sight and sound there lies an ugly significance.

A high pole was set up by the front gate, to exhibit to public view a bush made up of three withered branches of pine and oak, tied in a bunch by a bit of rag. Above the door stood a signboard about two feet square, on which an itinerant artist had painted (for a breakfast) a huge green letter I on a white field—a pun in ten letters for those who could read—the *Grand-I-Vert* (*hiver*).* A vulgar gaudy-colored advertisement on the left-hand side of the door announced "Good March Ale," a crude representation of a woman with an exaggeratedly low-necked dress, and a hussar, in uniform, strutting on either side of a foaming pint pot. In spite of the scent of flowers and the country air, a stale reek of wine and eatables always clung about the cabin, the same odor that lies in wait for you as you pass by some pot-house in a low quarter of Paris.

The place you know. Now, behold its inmates. Their history contains more than one lesson for the philanthropist.

The owner of the Grand-I-Vert, one François Tonsard, is not unworthy of the attention of philosophers, in that he contrived to solve the problem of how to lead a life of combined industry and idleness, in such a way that his idleness was highly profitable to himself, while no one was a penny the better for his industry.

He was a jack-of-all-trades. He could dig, but only on his own land. He could also do hedging and ditching, bark

* The Great Green I. Pronounced: grand ɛ ver (hiver) winter.

trees or fell them, for other people, for in all these occupations the master is at the mercy of the man. Tonsard owed his bit of land to Mlle. Laguerre's generosity. While a mere lad he did a day's work now and again for the gardener at the castle, for he had not his match at clipping trees in garden alleys, and trimmed hornbeams, and thorn-trees, and horse-chestnuts to admiration. His name Tonsard—literally, "the clipper"—is a sufficient indication of an aptitude descended from father to son, and in most country-places such monopolies are secured and maintained with as much cunning as ever city merchants use to the same end.

One day Mlle. Laguerre, strolling in her garden, overheard Tonsard, a fine strapping young fellow, saying, "All I want to live, and live happily too, is an acre of land!" Whereupon the good-natured creature, accustomed to make others happy, bestowed on Tonsard that bit of vineyard near the Blangy gate in return for a hundred days' work (a piece of delicacy scantily appreciated), and allowed him to take up his quarters at the Aigues, where he lived among the servants, who thought him the best of good fellows in Burgundy.

"Poor Tonsard" (as everybody called him) did about thirty days' work out of the hundred, the rest of the time he spent in laughing and flirting with the maids at the house, and more particularly with Mlle. Cochet, madame's own woman, though she was as ugly as a charming actress' maid is sure to be. A laugh, with Mlle. Cochet, was something so significant, that Soudry (the happy police sergeant of Blondet's letter) still gave Tonsard black looks after five-and-twenty years. The walnut-wood press and the four-post bedstead with curtains, which adorned the bedroom at the Grand-I-Vert, were, no doubt, the fruit of one of these titterings.

Once in possession of his bit of land, Tonsard replied to the first person who remarked that "madame had given it to him."

"By George, it's mine! honestly bought and honestly paid for. Do the bourgeois ever give you anything for nothing? And a hundred days' work is nothing, is it? That has cost me three hundred francs as it is, and the soil is all stones!"

The talk never went beyond the circle of the peasantry.

Tonsard next built the house himself. Finding the materials here and there, asking this one and that to do a hand's turn for him, pilfering odds and ends from the castle, or asking, and invariably having for what he asked. A rickety gateway pulled down to be removed found its way to his cow-shed. The window came from an old greenhouse. The hut, to prove so fatal to the castle, was built up of material from the castle.

Tonsard escaped military service, thanks to Gaubertin, Mlle. Laguerre's steward. Gaubertin's father was the public prosecutor of the department, and Gaubertin could refuse Mlle. Cochet nothing. When the house was finished and the vines in full bearing, Tonsard took unto himself a wife. A bachelor of three-and-twenty on a friendly footing at the Aigues, the good-for-nothing to whom madame had given an acre of land had every appearance of being a hard worker, and he had the wit to make the most of his negative virtues. His wife was the daughter of a tenant on the Ronquerolles estate on the other side of the forest of the Aigues.

This farmer farmed half a farm, which was going to wreck and ruin in his hands for want of a housewife. The inconsolable widower had tried to drown his cares in drink, in the English fashion; but time went on, he thought no more upon his loss, and at last found himself wedded to the wine-cask, in the jocular village phrase. Then in no long time the father-in-law ceased to be a farmer, and became a laborer; an idle, mischief-making, quarrelsome sot, sticking at nothing, like most men of his class who fall from a comparatively comfortable position into poverty. He could read and write, his edu-

cation and practical knowledge raised him above the level of the ordinary laborer, though his bad habits dragged him down to the level of the tramp; and, as we have seen, he had just been a match for one of the cleverest men in Paris in a Bucolic overlooked by Virgil.

At first they made old Fourchon the village schoolmaster at Blangy, but he lost his place, partly by misconduct, partly by his peculiar views of primary education. His pupils made more progress in the art of making paper boats and chickens out of the pages of their A B C books than in reading; and his homilies on pilfering orchards were strangely like lessons on the best manner of scaling walls. They still quote one of his sayings at Soulanges, an answer given to some urchin who came late with the excuse, "Lord, sir, I had to take our 'orse to the water."

"*H*orse we say, ye dunder'ead."

From a schoolmaster he became postman. This employment, which is as good as a pension to many an old soldier, got Daddy Fourchon into trouble every day of his life. Sometimes he left the letters in a tavern, sometimes he forgot to deliver them, sometimes he kept them in his pocket. When his wits were flustered with liquor, he would leave the correspondence of one commune in another; when he was sober he read the letters. He was promptly dismissed. Having nothing to hope in the way of a Government appointment, Daddy Fourchon at length turned his attention to manufacture. The very poorest do something in country places, and one and all, if they do not make an honest livelihood, make a pretense of earning it.

At the age of sixty-eight Fourchon took to rope-making on a small scale, that being a business in which the least possible amount of capital is needed. The first wall you find (as has been seen) is a sufficient workshop, ten francs will more than pay for your machinery; and the apprentice, like his master, sleeps in a barn, and lives on what he can pick up. So shall

you evade the rapacity of the law which vexes the poor with door and window tax. The raw material you borrow, and return a manufactured article.

But Daddy Fourchon, and Mouche his apprentice (the natural son of one of his natural daughters), had another resource, in fact, their mainstay and support, in otter-hunting, to say nothing of breakfasts and dinners given to the pair by illiterate folk who availed themselves of Daddy Fourchon's talents when a letter must be written or a bill made out. Finally, the old man could play the clarionet, and in the company of a crony, the fiddler of Soulanges, Vermichel by name, figured at village weddings and great balls at the Tivoli at Soulanges.

Vermichel's real name was Michel Vert; but the transposition was so much in use, that Brunet, clerk of the justice of the peace at Soulanges, described him in all documents as "Michel-Jean-Jerome Vert, otherwise Vermichel, witness."

Daddy Fourchon had been of use in past times to Vermichel, a fiddler held in high esteem by the old Burgundian regiment; and Vermichel out of gratitude for those services had procured for his friend the post of *practitioner* (the privilege of appearing before the justice of the peace in the interests of this or that person), for which any man who can sign his name is eligible in out-of-the-way places. So Daddy Fourchon's signature was appended to any judicial documents drawn up by the Sieur Brunet in the communes of Cerneux, Conches, and Blangy; and the names of Vermichel and Fourchon, bound together by a friendship cemented by twenty years of hobnobbing, seemed almost like the style of a firm.

Mouche and Fourchon, united as closely each to each by malpractices as Mentor and Telemachus of old by virtues, traveled like their antitypes in search of bread; *panis angelorum* (angels' bread: charity), the only words of Latin that linger yet in the memories of gray-headed villagers. The pair negotiated the scraps at Tonsard's tavern, or at the great

houses roundabout; for between them in their busiest and most prosperous years their achievement scarcely exceeded an average of some seven hundred yards of rope. In the first place, no tradesman for sixty miles round would have trusted either of them with a hank of tow, for this venerable person (anticipating the miracles of modern science) knew but too well how to transform the hemp into the divine juice of the grape. And, in the second place, beside being private secretary to three communes, Fourchon appeared for plaintiff or defendant before the justice of the peace, and performed at merrymakings upon the clarionet—his public duties were the ruin of his trade, he said.

So Tonsard's hopes, so fondly cherished, were nipped in the bud. Those comfortable additions to his property would never be his, and the ordinary luck of life confronted a lazy son-in-law with another do-nothing in the shape of his wife's father. And things were bound to do much the worse in that La Tonsard, a tall and shapely woman with a kind of broad-blown comeliness, showed no sort of taste for field work. Tonsard bore his wife a grudge for her father's bankruptcy, and treated her badly, taking his revenge after the fashion familiar to a class that sees the effects, but seldom traces the cause.

The wife, finding her bondage hard, sought alleviations. She took advantage of Tonsard's vices to govern him. He was an ease-loving glutton, so she encouraged him in idleness and gluttony. She managed to secure for him the good-will of the servants at the castle, and he, satisfied with the results, did not grumble at the means. He troubled himself uncommonly little about his wife's doings, so long as she did all that he required of her, a tacit understanding in which every second married couple lives. The tavern was La Tonsard's next invention, and her first customers were the servants, gamekeepers, and stablemen from the Aigues.

Gaubertin, Mlle. Laguerre's agent, was one of *La belle* (the handsome) *Tonsard's* earliest patrons; he let her have a few

hogsheads of good wine to attract custom. The effect of these presents, periodically renewed so long as Gaubertin remained a bachelor, together with the fame of the not too obdurate beauty among the Don Juans of the valley, brought custom to the house. La Tonsard, being fond of good eating, became an excellent cook; and though she exercised her talents only on dishes well known in the country, such as jugged hare, game-sauce, sea-pie, and omelettes, she was supposed to understand to admiration the art of cooking a meal served at a table's end, and so prodigiously overseasoned that it induces thirst. In these ways she managed Tonsard; she gave him a downward push, and he asked nothing better than to abandon himself and roll luxuriously down hill.

The rogue became a confirmed poacher; he had nothing to fear. His wife's relations with Gaubertin, bailiffs, and keepers, and the relaxed notions of property of the Revolution, assured him of complete impunity. As soon as the children grew big enough, he made what he could out of them, and was no more scrupulous as to their conduct than he had been with his wife's. He had two girls and two boys. Tonsard lived, like his wife, from hand to mouth, and there would soon have been an end of this merry life of his if he had not laid down the almost martial law that every one in his house must contribute to his comfort, in which, for that matter, the rest of them shared. By the time that the family was reared at the expense of those from whom the wife knew how to extort presents, this is a statement of the finances of the Grand-I-Vert.

Tonsard's old mother and two girls, Catherine and Marie, were always picking up firewood. Twice a day they would come home bending under the weight of a faggot that reached to the ankle and projected a couple of feet above their heads. The outside of the faggot was made of dead sticks; the green wood often cut from young saplings was hidden away inside it.*

*It is permitted to gather dead branches in the forests, but a heavy penalty attaches to cutting live wood.

In the fullest sense of the words, Tonsard took all his winter fuel from the forest of the Aigues.

The father and both boys were habitual poachers. From September to March all the game that they did not eat at home they sold. Hares and rabbits, partridges, thrushes, and roebucks—they took them all to Soulanges, the little town where Tonsard's girls took milk from door to door every morning and carried back the news, taken in exchange for the gossip of the Aigues, Cerneux, and Conches. When their season was over, the three Tonsards set snares, and, if the snares were too successful, La Tonsard made pies and sold them in Ville-aux-Fayes. In harvest-time the whole family—the old mother, the two lads (until they were seventeen years old), the two girls, old Fourchon and Mouche, seven in all of the Tonsard clan—mustered and went gleaning. They would pick up nearly sixteen bushels a day among them, rye, barley, wheat—anything that was grist for the mill.

At first the youngest girl took the two cows to graze by the side of the road; though the animals, for the most part, broke through the hedges into the fields of the Aigues. But as the rural policeman was bound to take cognizance of anything of the nature of flagrant trespass, the slightest mistake on the children's part was always punished by a whipping or by the loss of some dainty, till they had become singularly expert at hearing sounds of an approaching enemy. The keepers at the Aigues and the rural policeman scarcely ever caught them in the act. Moreover, the relations between the aforesaid functionaries and the Tonsards, husband and wife, dimmed their eyes to these things. The cows soon grew obedient to a pull at the long cord or a low peculiar call, when they found that as soon as the danger was past they might leave the roadside to finish their meal in the neighboring field.

Tonsard's old mother, growing more and more feeble, succeeded to Mouche when old Fourchon took him away under pretense of educating the boy himself. Marie and Catherine

made hay in the woods. They knew the patches where the grass grew sweet and delicate, and cut and turned it, and made and stacked the hay. They found two-thirds of the winter fodder in the woods, and on the sunniest winter days took the cows to pasture on spots well known to them where the grass was green even in cold weather; for in certain places round about the Aigues, as in Piedmont and Lombardy, and every hill country, there are bits of land where the grass grows in winter. Such a meadow, called a *marcita* in Italy, is a very valuable property there; but in France, to do well, there must be neither too much frost nor too much snow. The phenomenon is doubtless due partly to a particular aspect, partly to the infiltration of the water, which keeps the land at a higher temperature.

The calves brought in about eighty francs; and the milk, after making deductions for the calves, was worth about a hundred and sixty francs in money, beside the supply for the house and the dairy. Tonsard made some hundred and fifty crowns by doing a day's work for one and another.

The tavern, all expenses paid, brought in about three hundred francs, not more, for merry-makings are essentially short-lived, and confined to certain seasons. La Tonsard and her husband, moreover, usually received notice of a "bean-feast" beforehand, and laid in the small quantity of meat required and the necessary provisions from the town. In ordinary years the wine from the Tonsards' vineyard fetched twenty francs the cask (the cask not included); a tavern-keeper at Soulanges, with whom Tonsard had dealings, was the purchaser. In abundant years the vineyard would yield twelve hogsheads, but the average produce was eight, and half of these Tonsard kept for his own trade. In vine-growing districts the grape gleanings are the perquisite of the vintagers, and the grape gleaning was worth three casks of wine annually to the Tonsard family. Sheltered by local customs, they showed little conscience in their proceedings, finding their

way into vineyards before the vintagers had done their work, just as they hurried into the cornfields where the sheaves stood waiting to be carted away. So, of the seven or eight hogsheads sold, one-half was cribbed, and fetched a better price. There was a certain amount of dead loss to be deducted in the budget, for Tonsard and his wife always ate of the best, and drank better liquor than they sold—supplied to them by their Soulanges correspondent in exchange for their own wines, but, altogether, the money made by the united efforts of the family amounted to nine hundred francs or thereabouts, for they fattened a couple of pigs every year—one for themselves and one for sale.

As time went on the tavern became the favorite haunt of laborers and of all the scamps in the countryside; this was due partly to the talents of the Tonsard family, partly to the good-fellowship existing between them and the lowest class in the valley. Then both the girls were remarkably handsome, and walked in the ways of their mother; and, finally, the Grand-I-Vert was such an old-established tavern (dating, as it did, from 1795) that it became an institution. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes the laborers came to conclude their bargains there, and to hear the news gathered by the Tonsard girls and Mouche and Fourchon, retailed by Vermichel or Brunet, the most renowned clerk of Soulanges, who came thither to find his practitioners.

The prices of hay and wine, day-work and piece-work, were fixed there; questions were referred to Tonsard's decision; and he, a sovereign judge in such matters, gave advice and drank with the rest. Soulanges, so the saying ran, was simply a fashionable place where people amused themselves; Blangy was the place for business, albeit eclipsed by the great metropolis of Ville-aux-Fayes, which in twenty-five years had come to be the capital of the magnificent valley. The grain and cattle market was held in the square at Blangy; the ruling prices there served as a guide for the whole district.

La Tonsard, being a keeper-at-home, was still plump and fair and young looking, when women who work in the fields fade as quickly as the field flowers, and are old crones at thirty. Moreover, La Tonsard liked to look her best. She was only neat and tidy, but in a village tidiness and neatness mean luxury. The girls were dressed better than befitted their poverty, and followed their mother's example. Their bodices were almost elegant, and the linen beneath was finer than any that the richest peasant's wife wears. On high days and holidays they appeared in fine frocks, how paid for heaven only knows. The servants at the Aigues let them have their cast-off clothing at a price within their reach; and gowns which had swept the pavements in Paris, altered to suit Marie and Catherine, were flaunted at the sign of the Grand-I-Vert. Neither of the girls, the gypsies of the valley, received a farthing from their parents, who merely boarded and lodged them, letting them lie in the loft at night on filthy mattresses, where the grandmother and two brothers slept as well, all huddled together in the hay like brutes. Neither father nor mother thought anything of this promiscuity. The age of iron and the age of gold have more resemblances than we think. Nothing arouses vigilance in the one, everything arouses it in the other, and for society the result is apparently the same. The old woman's presence, which seemed to be less a safeguard than a necessity, only made matters worse.

The Abbé Brossette, after a close study of the state of things among his parishioners, made this profound remark to the bishop—

"When you see how greatly they rely on their poverty, my lord, you can guess that these peasantry are in terror of losing their great excuse for their dissolute lives."

Everybody was aware how little the Tonsard family knew of scruples or principles, but nobody found any fault with their way of life.

At the outset of this scene it must be explained, once for

all, that the peasant's code is not the bourgeois code, and that in family life the peasants have no sort of delicacy. If a daughter is seduced, they do not take a moral tone unless the seducer is rich and can be frightened. Their children, until the State tears them away from their parents, are so much capital, or are made to conduce to their parents' comfort. Selfishness, more especially since 1789, is the one force that sets them thinking; they never ask whether such a thing is illegal or immoral, but what good it will do them.

Morality, which must not be confused with religion, begins with a competence, just as in still higher spheres delicacy flourishes in human nature as soon as fortune has gilded the surrounding furniture. An entirely honest and well-conducted peasant is an exception to his class. The curious will ask how this is, and here is the principal cause, one of many which might be advanced: The peasant's functions in the social scale bring him into close contact with nature; he lives a purely material life, very much like the life of a savage. The toil which exhausts the body leaves the mind stagnant, and this is especially the case with uneducated people. And, finally, their poverty is their *raison d'État*, and their necessity is to them a necessity, as the Abbé Brossette said.

Tonsard was ready to listen to the complaint of every one, and frauds useful to the needy were invented under his direction. The wife, a good-natured woman to all appearance, helped evil-doers with a rancorous tongue, and never withheld her countenance or refused a helping-hand when anything against "the masters" was afoot. The tavern was a perfect nest of vipers, where the hatred which the proletariat and the peasantry bear to the rich and their employers was nursed and kept alive, venomous and active.

The Tonsards' prosperity was, in those times, the worst of examples. Every one asked himself why he should not help himself to wood as they did in the forest of the Aigues, and find fuel for the oven and faggots for cold weather. Why

should not every one else feed a cow on rich people's pastures, and have game enough to eat and to sell? Why should they not reap without sowing at harvest and vintage? Then the underhand theft, which robbed the woods and took tithes of the cornland, meadows, and vineyards, promptly came to be regarded as a vested interest in the communes of Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux, which encircled the Aigues. This canker, for reasons which will be explained in the proper place, was far worse on the Aigues estate than on the lands of Ronquerolles and Soulanges. Do not imagine that Tonsard, or his old mother, or wife or children, ever said in so many words, "We will steal our living, and we will do our thieving cleverly." The habits had formed slowly. The family began by mixing a few green boughs with the sticks; then, grown bold with habit, and purposely allowed to go unpunished (part of a scheme to be developed in the course of the story), in twenty years' time they had come to the point of "taking *their* wood," and making a living almost entirely by pilfering. The right of pasture for their cows, the abuse of the privileges of gleaning and grape-gleaning, had been established little by little in this way; and when once the Tonsards and the rest of the lazy peasants in the valley had felt the benefit of the four rights acquired by the poor in the country, rights pushed almost to spoliation, it may be imagined that they were not likely to relinquish them unless compelled by some force stronger than their audacity.

At the time when this story begins, Tonsard was about fifty years old. He was a tall, strong man, somewhat inclined to stoutness, with black woolly hair, and a face of a startling hue, mottled with purplish streaks like a brick, yellow whites to his eyes, flapping ears with huge rims, a low flattened forehead, and hanging lip. A deceptive flabbiness of flesh covered the muscles beneath, and the man's true character was hidden under a certain stupidity enlightened by flashes of experience, which seemed the more like wit because, in the society of his

father-in-law, he had learned a dialect called "chaff" in the dictionary of Messieurs Fourchon and Vermichel. Tonsard's nose was flattened at the end as if the finger of God had set a mark upon him; he spoke in consequence from the roof of the mouth, like those whom disease has disfigured by thickening of the nasal passages through which the breath passes with difficulty. His front teeth overlapped—a defect ominously significant, according to Lavater, and the more conspicuous because they were white as a dog's teeth. There was that in the man, beneath the veneer of an idle fellow's good humor and the easy-going ways of a tippling boor, which should have alarmed the least perspicacious.

Tonsard's portrait, the picture of his cabin, and the sketch of his father-in-law seem to occupy a prominent position, but you may be sure that this place is due to the man, the tavern, and the family; for the life which has been so minutely described is a typical life, one of a hundred led by peasants in the valley; and although Tonsard was only a tool in the hands of a deeply rooted and energetic hate, he personally exercised an immense influence on the fortunes of the battle about to begin; he was the cave to which all that were discontented among the lowest class betook themselves; his tavern (as will shortly be seen) was over and over again the trysting-place of the party, even as he himself became the head of the movement, by reason of the terror which he inspired, less by what he actually did than by what people expected him to do. The poacher's threats were quite as much dreaded as his action; he was never obliged to carry out a single one of them.

Every rebellion, open or covert, has its standard. The flag of marauders, idlers, and sots, therefore, was the redoubtable bush at the top of the pole by the gate of the Grand-I-Vert. People found it amusing in the tavern, and amusement is as much sought after and as hard to find in the country as in the town. There was no other tavern, moreover, along twelve miles of road, a journey which loaded vehicles easily made in

three hours, so all who came and went between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes stopped at the tavern if only for a rest. Then the miller, the deputy-mayor of the arrondissement, came in now and then, and his lads came, too; the general's servants did not despise the little wineshop, for Tonsard's two girls were an attraction, and so it fell out that through this subterranean connection with the castle the Tonsards could learn all that they desired. It is impossible, by dint of benefits conferred or expected, to break the permanent alliance between servants and the people. The lackey comes from the people, and to the people he belongs. This ill-omened good-fellowship explains Charles' discreet choice of language at the foot of the flight of steps.

IV.

ANOTHER IDYL.

"Oh! Lord sakes, dad!" cried Tonsard, at the sight of his father-in-law, whom he suspected had come for a breakfast. "You are dry in the throat too early of a morning. We have nothing for you! And how about that rope, the rope you were to make for us? It is a marvel how you work at it of an evening, and find so little done next morning. You ought to have twisted enough to twist your own neck with ages ago, for you are growing altogether too dear——"

(The wit of the peasant and laborer is of the exceedingly Attic kind, which consists in saying the thing that you really think with a certain grotesque exaggeration; nor is the wit of drawing-rooms essentially different; intellectual subtleties replace the picturesqueness of coarse, forcible language, that is all the difference.)

"'Tisn't a father-in-law," the old man interrupted; "treat me as a customer. I want a bottle of the best."

So saying, Fourchon sat down, showing a five-franc piece

that shone like a sun through his fingers as he rapped on the sorry table—a piece of furniture curious to behold by reason of its charred spots, wine stains, and notches covered with a coating of grease. At the sound of silver, Marie Tonsard, like a privateering corvette on a cruise, gave her grandfather a quick glance, a sly look that gleamed like a yellow spark in her blue eyes; and the jingling of the metal brought La Tonsard out of her room.

"You are always hard on poor father," said she, looking at Tonsard, "and yet he earns a good deal of money in a year. God grant it is honestly come by! Let us have a look at this," she added, and she pounced down on the coin, and snatched it out of old Fourchon's hands.

"Go, Marie," Tonsard said with gravity; "there is still some wine in the bottle left under the shelf."

(In country places there is but one quality of wine, but it is sold under two names—wine from the cask and wine in bottle.)

"Where did that come from?" La Tonsard demanded of her father, as she slipped the coin into her pocket.

"Philippine, you will come to a bad end," retorted her parent, shaking his head, without an attempt to recover his money. By this time, doubtless, Fourchon recognized the futility of a struggle between his terrible son-in-law, his daughter, and himself.

"There's one more bottle of wine for which you get five francs out of me," he added sarcastically, "but that shall be the last. I shall take my custom to the Café de la Paix."

"You be quiet, father," returned the fat, fair mistress of the house, who was rather like a Roman matron. "You want a shirt, a tidy pair of trousers, and another hat, and I should like to see you in a new waistcoat at last."

"I have told you before that that would be the ruin of me!" the old man shouted. "If people think I am rich, they won't give me anything."

The entrance of the fair-haired Marie with the bottle cut short old Fourchon's eloquence, for he did not lack that characteristic of an outspokenness which permits itself to say everything, and shrinks not from giving any thought expression however atrocious it may be.

"Then you have no mind to tell us where you bag so much money?" asked Tonsard. "Some of us might go there, I suppose?——"

The brutal master of the house, while finishing a snare, was eyeing his father-in-law. He scanned the old man's trousers, and soon spied the round edge of the second five-franc piece in his pocket.

"Here's to you! I am turning capitalist," said old Fourchon.

"So you could, if you liked," said Tonsard; "you are clever enough, you are, only the devil made a hole in the bottom of your head, and everything runs down through it."

"Eh! I have been playing off the otter dodge on that young fellow from Paris up at the Aigues, that is all!"

"If many people were to come to see the source of the Avonne, you would be rich, Daddy Fourchon," said Marie.

"Yes," and he drank off the last glass of his bottle. "But I've played the otter dodge so often that the otters are growing angry, and one ran between my legs, which will bring me twenty francs and more."

"You made an otter out of tow, daddy, I'll be bound," said La Tonsard, with a knowing look at the old man.

"If you give me a pair of trousers, a waistcoat, and a pair of list braces, so as I shan't be too much of a discredit to Vermichel on our platform at the Tivoli (for old Socquard is always grumbling at me), I will let you keep the money, daughter; your idea is quite worth it. I may take in that young fellow again; after this one try, he may very likely take to otter-hunting."

"Go and find us another bottle," said Tonsard, addressing

his daughter. "If your father had an otter, he would let us see it," he added, speaking to his wife. He hoped to rouse Fourchon's vanity.

"I am too much afraid of seeing her in your frying-pan," the old man said, and one little green eye winked at La Tonsard. "Philippine has just sneaked my five-france piece, and how much haven't you bullied out of me for clothes and board, forsooth! And you tell me that I am dry too early in the day, and I never have clothes to my back——"

"Because you sold your last suit to buy spiced wine at the Café de la Paix!" said his daughter; "and, proof of that, Vermichel tried to stop you——"

"Vermichel! After I stood treat! Vermichel is incapable of treachery to friendship. It will be that hundredweight of stale bacon on two legs that he is not ashamed to call his wife!"

"He or she," said Tonsard, "or Bonnébault——"

"If it was Bonnébault," retorted Fourchon, "him as is one of the pillars of the café—I'll—I'll—— That's enough?"

"But where's the harm if you did sell your things, old plate-licker? You sold them because you sold them; you are of age," returned Tonsard, slapping the old man's knee. "Come, give your custom to my barrels, redden your gullet; the missus' father has a right to do it, and better do that than carry your white silver to Socquard's."

"To think that you have played tunes for them to dance to at the Tivoli these fifteen years, and cannot find out how Socquard mulls his wine, you that are so cunning!" said his daughter, addressing her parent. "And yet you know quite well that with that secret we should be as rich as Rigou."

In the Morvan, and that strip of Burgundy which lies on the Paris side of the Morvan, the spiced wine with which La Tonsard reproached her father is a somewhat expensive beverage, which plays a great part in the lives of the peasants. Grocers compound it with more or less success, so do lemon-

ade-makers where there are cafés. The delectable drink, composed of choice wine, sugar, cinnamon, and other spices, is much to be preferred to the multifarious mixtures and disguised forms of brandy known as ratafia, *cent-sept-ans* (seven hundred years), *eau-des-braves* (water for the valiant), cordial, vespetro, *esprit-de-soleil* (sun spirit), and the like. Spiced wine is to be found even on the very borders of Switzerland. In wild nooks in the Jura, where an occasional determined tourist penetrates, the innkeepers call it Wine of Syracuse, taking the word of commercial travelers. It is not bad in itself; and when mountain-climbing has induced a wolfish hunger, you are only too glad to pay the three or four francs charged for a bottle. In every household in Burgundy or the Morvan any trifling ailment or excitement is an excuse for drinking spiced wine. Women take it, before and after a confinement, with toast and sugar. Peasants have been known to squander their whole substance on spiced wine, and not unfrequently the too attractive liquor necessitates marital correction.

"There is no smoking that," said Fourchon. "Socquard always shuts himself up to make his spiced wine. He did not let his wife that's gone into the secret, and he has everything from Paris to make the stuff."

"Don't you tease your father," cried Tonsard. "He doesn't know—well and good, he doesn't know. One can't know everything."

Fourchon felt uneasy at this affability of speech and countenance on the part of his son-in-law.

"Be you minded to rob me?" the old man asked naïvely.

"*I've* nothing but what lawfully belongs to me," said Tonsard; "and when I take anything away from you, I am only helping myself to the portion you promised I should have."

The rough words reassured Fourchon. He bowed his head, like a man convicted and convinced.

"There's a fine springe," Tonsard continued, coming up

to his father-in-law and putting the trap on the old man's knees.

"They will want game up at the Aigues, and we will supply them with some of their own, certain sure, or there is no Providence for us poor folk."

"You have made a good strong job of it," said the old man, surveying the deadly engine.

"Let us pick up a few pence at any rate, dad," said La Tonsard; "we shall have our slice of the loaf of the Aigues almost——"

"Babblers!" Tonsard broke in. "If I am hanged, it will not be for a gunshot, but the clack of your daughter's tongue."

"Then do you think that the Aigues will be sold in lots, for the sake of your ugly phiz? What, old Rigou has been sucking the marrow out of your bones these thirty years, and you don't know that the bourgeois are worse than the seigneurs? When that affair comes off, those nobodies, the Soudrys, Gaubertins, and Rigous will set you dancing to the tune of *'J'ai du bon tabac, tu n'en auras pas,'** the national anthem of the rich, eh? The peasant will always be the peasant. Don't you see (but you know nothing about politics) that Government puts on the wine-dues simply to do us out of our chink and keep us poor? The bourgeois or the Government, it is all one. What would become of them if we were all rich? Would they work in the fields? Would they do the harvesting? They must have poor folk. I was rich for ten years, and I know quite well what I used to think about paupers!"

"You must hunt with them, all the same," said Tonsard, "because they break up the big estates into lots, and we can turn on Rigou afterward. He is eating up Courtecuisse; but if I were in Courtecuisse's place, poor fellow, I would have paid my shot in lead instead of silver, long ago——"

"Right you are," said Fourchon. "It is as old Niseron

* I have good tobacco, but thou has none.

says, who kept on being a Republican after everybody else left off, 'The people dies hard, the people don't die, they have time on their side!'"

The old man dropped into a kind of dream. Tonsard took advantage of this to take back his springe; but as he laid his hand upon it, he made a slit with a pair of scissors in the old man's trousers, and just as Fourchon raised his glass to drink the five-franc piece slid down to a place on the floor that was always damp with the dregs of glasses. Tonsard set his foot on it. It was neatly done; yet the old man might perhaps have found it out if Vermichel had not turned up at that very moment.

"Tonsard!" called that functionary from the foot of the steps. "Where is your dad, do you know?"

Vermichel shouted, the coin was stolen, and the glass emptied simultaneously.

"Here, captain!" said Fourchon, holding out a hand to help Vermichel up the steps.

You cannot imagine a type more throughly Burgundian than Vermichel. His countenance, not crimson but scarlet, like certain tropical portions of the globe bore several conspicuous extinct volcanoes, and a greenish eruption, which Fourchon rather poetically called "grog blossoms." The features of this inflamed face had been swollen out of all knowledge through habitual drunkenness; it was a cyclopean visage, with an eye keen and wide awake on one side, but blind on the other, where the sight was obscured by a yellowish film. With a shock head of red hair and a beard of the traditional Judas pattern, Vermichel's appearance was as formidable as his nature was harmless. His trumpet-like nose was a sort of note of interrogation, to which a huge slit of a mouth seemed to reply even when shut.

Vermichel was a little man. He wore iron-bound shoes, trousers of bottle-green velveteen, an ancient vest so much mended that it looked like a bit of patchwork quilt, a rough,

blue cloth coat, and a broad-brimmed gray hat. This splendor of costume—demanded of him by his functions in the town of Soulanges, where he combined the offices of hall-porter at the town hall, town-crier, gaoler, fiddler, and solicitor—was entirely due to the exertions of Mme. Vermichel, a terrible foe to Rabelaisian philosophy. This mustached virago, a good yard broad, seventeen stone in weight, and active in proportion to her size, bore rule over Vermichel; she beat him when he was drunk, and when he was sober he allowed her to beat him, for which reason old Fourchon cast contemptuous eyes on Vermichel's apparel—"The garb of a slave!" he used to call it.

"Talk of the sun and you see his rays," Fourchon continued, repeating an old joke occasioned by Vermichel's red beaming countenance, and indeed it was not unlike the gilded sun hung out for a sign above country inns. "Did your missus see too much dust on your jacket, and are you running away from your four-fifths? (for you can't call that wife of yours your better *half*). What brings you here so early, eh, beaten drum?"

"Politics, as usual," said Vermichel; evidently he was used to these jokes.

"Oh! Business is flat at Blangy, and we shall have bills protested directly," said old Fourchon, pouring out a glass for his friend.

"Our ape is on my tracks," said Vermichel, raising his glass.

In laborers' slang the *ape* is the master. This was another expression in Messrs. Vermichel and Fourchon's dictionary.

"Why is Master Brunet coming to bother us up here?" demanded La Tonsard.

"Eh, goodness, you people have brought him in more than you are worth yourselves these three years. Oh, the master up at the Aigues is going to pay you out properly. He is coming on well, is the Upholsterer. As old Brunet says, 'If

there were three like him in the valley, my fortune would be made——'"

"What have they been plotting afresh against the poor folk?" asked Marie.

"My word," answered Vermichel, "he is no fool, he isn't! You will have to knuckle under in the long run. There is no help for it! They have been in force for the last two years, with their four gamekeepers and a mounted patrol all running about like ants, and a forester that works like a nigger. And now the police will do anything they like for them. They will grind you down——"

"Not they!" said Tonsard; "we are too small already. It is not the trees as stands out longest, it's the grass."

"Don't you believe it," old Fourchon retorted; "you have land of your own——"

"After all," Vermichel went on, "those folk are very fond of you, for they think of you from morning to night. This is the sort of thing they say—'Those people pasture their cattle on our meadows, so we will take their cattle away from them, and then they cannot eat the grass in our meadows themselves.' As one and all of you have judgments hanging over you, they have given orders to our *ape* to seize your cows. We are going to begin with Conches; this morning we shall seize Mother Bonnébault's cow, Godain's cow, Mitant's cow beside——"

As soon as Marie heard the name of Bonnébault, she looked knowingly at her father and mother, and darted out of the house and into the vineyard; she was Bonnébault's sweetheart, and the old woman with the cow was Bonnébault's grandmother. She slipped like an eel through a hole in the hedge, and fled away to Conches with the speed of a hare with the hounds on her track.

"They will do this much," said Tonsard placidly; "they will get their bones broken, and that will be a pity, for their mothers won't find them new ones."

"That may very well happen, all the same," assented Fourchon. "But look here, Vermichel, I can't come with you for an hour yet; I have important business at the castle."

"More important than three fees of five sous each? You had better not quarrel with your own bread and butter."

"My business lies at the Aigues, I tell you, Vermichel," said old Fourchon, with ludicrous self-importance.

"Beside, suppose that father had better be out of the way," said La Tonsard. "Now, maybe you would mean to look for the cows?" she queried.

"Monsieur Brunet is a good soul; if he finds nothing but the cow-dung, he will ask no better," answered Vermichel. "A man like him, that has to go about the roads of a night, ought to mind what he is about."

"If he does, he is right," Tonsard said drily.

"So he talks like this to Monsieur Michaud," Vermichel went on. "'I shall go as soon as the court rises.' If he really meant to find the cows, he would have gone to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. But there, go he must, Monsieur Brunet. You won't catch Michaud napping twice; he is an old, old dog, and up to everything. Ah, there's a ruffian for you!"

"A bully like that ought to have stopped in the army," said Tonsard; "he is only fit to let loose on the enemy. I wish he would come here, I know, and ask me my name; he may call himself a veteran of the Young Guard as much as he pleases, sure am I that, after we measured our spurs, I'd pull more feathers out of the old cock than he would have out of me."

"Oh, by-the-by," said La Tonsard, turning to Vermichel, "there are the advertisements of the fete at Soulanges, when will they be out? Here we are at the 8th of August."

"I took them yesterday to the printer, Monsieur Bournier, at Ville-aux-Fayes," said Vermichel. "There was talk at Ma'am Soudry's of fireworks on the lake."

"What a lot of people we shall surely have!" cried old Fourchon.

"And the takings of days together for Socquard," said Tonsard enviously.

"Oh, perhaps it will rain," added his wife, as if to reassure herself.

The sound of horse-hoofs came from the direction of Soulanges, and five minutes later the clerk of the court tied his horse to a stake set for that purpose by the wicket-gate, near the cowshed. He soon showed his face at the door.

"Come, come, boys, let us lose no time," cried he, with a pretense of hurry.

"Ha!" said Vermichel, "here's a deserter for you, Monsieur Brunet. Daddy Fourchon wants to drop out of this business."

"He has had a drop too much," retorted the clerk, "but the law does not require him to be sober."

"Asking your pardon, Monsieur Brunet," said Fourchon, "I am expected at Aigues on business; there is a bargain for an otter on hand."

Brunet was a little dried-up man, dressed in black cloth from head to foot. With his bilious complexion, sly eyes, crisp hair, firm mouth, pinched nose, fidgety manner, and hoarse voice, his whole appearance and character exactly suited his profession. So well versed was he in law, or, rather, in chicanery, that he was at once the adviser and the terror of the canton; and, moreover, he did not lack a certain kind of popularity among the peasants, of whom, for the most part, he took payment in kind. All his positive and negative qualities, together with his knowledge of all their ways, had brought him a practice in the district, to the prejudice of his colleague, Maître Plissoud, of whom more will be said later on. It not unfrequently happens in country places that one clerk of the peace does all the business, and the other has none.

"Then is there any hurry?" asked La Tonsard of little Brunet.

"There is no help for it! You are plundering that man beyond everything, and it's in self-defense," said the clerk. "This whole business of yours will end badly; the Government will take it up."

"So we poor wretches are to die like dogs, are we?" asked Tonsard, bringing out a glass of brandy on a platter for the clerk.

"The poor may die like dogs, there will always be plenty left," said Fourchon sententiously.

"And then you do more damage than a little in the woods," pursued the man of law.

"Don't you believe it, Monsieur Brunet; there is a good deal of noise made about a few miserable faggots, that there is!" said La Tonsard.

"They did not clear away enough rich people at the time of the Revolution, that is all," said Tonsard.

As he spoke a sound was heard, alarming in that it was inexplicable. A sound of footsteps at a furious pace, the rattle of arms rising above a crackling sound of brushwood dragged along the ground, and a patter of feet that fled faster than the pursuer. Two voices as different as the footsteps bawled interjections. The group in the tavern knew that it was a man in hot chase and a woman in flight, but why and wherefore? The suspense did not last long.

"That's mother," remarked Tonsard, starting up; "I know her squall."

And in another moment, after springing up the broken steps with a final effort such as smugglers' legs alone can make, Granny Tonsard fell backward, sprawling in their midst. The huge mass of wood and sticks in her faggot made a terrific amount of noise as it bent and broke against the lintel and the ceiling. Every one whisked out of her way. Tables, bottles, and chairs were overturned in all directions as the branches

fell about; the whole cabin might have fallen in with a less mighty crash.

"He has killed me, the scamp! the shock has killed me and——"

Then the old woman's shriek, flight, and sudden entrance were all explained by an apparition on the threshold; there stood a man dressed in green cloth from head to foot, his hat bound with a silver cord, a sabre at his side, and the crest of Montcornet and Troisville stamped on his shoulder belt; he wore the soldier's regulation-red vest and leather gaiters reaching just above the knee.

It was a forester. There was a moment's hesitation; then the man exclaimed, as he saw Brunet and Vermichel, "I have witnesses!"

"Of what?" asked Tonsard.

"That woman has an oak ten years old, chopped into billets, in her faggot. Downright stealing!"

As soon as the word "witness" was pronounced, Vermichel considered that the moment was eminently suitable for going into the croft to take the air.

"Witnesses of what? Of what?" cried Tonsard, planting himself in front of the forester, while La Tonsard raised her prostrate mother-in-law. "Have the goodness to show me a clean pair of heels, Vatel! Pounce on people and draw up your reports on the highway where you are on your own ground, you brigand, but get out of this. My house belongs to me, I suppose. A man's house is his castle, and you know right well——"

"I caught your mother in the act, and she will come along with me."

"Arrest my mother in my house! You have no right to do it! My house is inviolable, every one knows that much at least. Have you a magistrate's warrant from Monsieur Guerbet? Ah! that is what the police must have before they come into the house, and you are not a policeman, though you may

have taken your oath at the court to make us die of hunger, you pitiful forest catch-poll."

The forester's rage rose to such a pitch that he tried to seize on the faggot; but the old hag, a hideous, dirty bit of parchment endowed with life, such as you will not see save in David's picture of the Sabines, yelled, "If you touch that, I'll go for your eyes."

"Look here, I dare you to undo the faggot before Monsieur Brunet," said the forester.

Although the clerk assumed the air of indifference which officials learn to wear in experience of affairs, he looked at the host and his wife, and blinked in a way which meant, "This is a bad business!"

As for old Fourchon, he pointed to the heap of ashes on the hearth, and looked at his daughter. In a moment La Tonsard grasped the situation, her mother-in-law's peril, and her father's mute counsel; she snatched up a handful of ashes and dashed it full in the forester's eyes. Vatel began to yell. Tonsard, illuminated by all the light of which the other was bereft, pushed him roughly out on to the steps, where a blind man might easily miss his footing. Vatel rolled down into the road, and dropped his gun. In the twinkling of an eye the faggot was unbound, the logs extracted and hidden with a nimbleness which no words can describe. Brunet, having no mind to be a witness to an exploit which he had foreseen, hurried out to the forester's assistance, picked him up, set him on the bank, and went to soak his handkerchief in water, so as to bathe the sufferer's eyes; for, in spite of the pain, the man was trying to drag himself toward the brook to ease his anguish.

"Vatel, you are in the wrong," said the clerk. "You have no right to enter a house, you know——"

On the threshold stood the old woman, a dwarfish, almost hunchbacked figure; lightnings flashed from her eyes, while insults poured from her tongue; the toothless crone foamed at

the mouth, standing with her hands on her hips, yelling so loud that they might have heard her at Blangy.

"Ah! scamp, serves you right, it does! Hell confound you! Suspect me of cutting trees, *me* the honestest woman in the place, and hunt me down like vermin! I should like to see you lose your cursed eyes! and then there would be peace again in the countryside. You bring bad luck, every one of you, you and your mates, making up shameful stories to stir up strife between your master and us——"

The forester submitted while the justice's clerk cleared the ashes from his eyes, and bathed them, demonstrating all the while that his patient had put himself in the wrong as to the law.

"The harridan! She has tired us out," Vatel said at last; "she has been in the wood ever since it was light——"

Meanwhile the stolen goods were concealed, the whole family lent a hand, and in a trice everything in the tavern was in its place again. This done, Tonsard came to the door and took a high and mighty tone.

"Vatel, sonny, the next time you take it into your head to force your way into my house, my gun will have something to say to you. You have had the ashes this time, you may catch a sight of the fire next. You don't know your business. You are feeling warm after this; if you would like a glass of wine, they'll bring one for you; you can see for yourself if there is a scrap of live wood in my mother's faggot, it is all sticks."

"Scum of the earth!" ejaculated the forester for Brunet's benefit, more hurt in his mind by that piece of irony than by the ashes in his eyes.

Just at that moment Charles, the man who had been sent in search of Blondet, appeared at the gate.

"Why, what is the matter, Vatel?" cried he.

"Oh!" answered the forester, drying his eyes, which he had been dipping wide open in the stream for a final cleansing,

"I have some debtors up there; I will make them curse the day when they first saw the light."

"If that is the way you take it, Monsieur Vatel," said Tonsard coolly, "you will find out that we Burgundians are no milksops."

Vatel went off. Charles, but little curious to know the meaning of the enigma, looked in at the tavern door.

"Come up to the castle, you and your otter, if you have one," said he to old Fourchon.

The old man hastily rose and followed Charles down the castle road.

"Look here now, where is that otter of yours?" asked Charles, smiling incredulously.

"Over here," said the other, turning toward the Thune. The Thune was a little stream formed by the overflow of the millstream and the rivulets in the park at the Aigues. The Thune flows by the side of the road until it reaches the little lake at Soulanges, pouring into it on one side and out at the other, turning the mills at Soulanges, filling the ponds by the castle, and finally joining the Avonne again.

"There her is. I hid her in the bottom of the stream at the Aigues with a stone tied to her neck."

As the old man stooped and raised himself again, he missed the five-franc piece from his pocket; such a coin was there so seldom that he missed the novel sensation at once.

"Oh! the rascals!" he cried; "I snare otters, and they snare their father, they do. They take all that I make from me, and tell me that it is for my benefit. Oh, I believe them, when they talk about my benefit. If it weren't for poor Mouche, the comfort of my old age, I would go and drown myself. Children are the ruin of their fathers. You are not married, are you, Monsieur Charles? Never marry, and then you won't have to repent of breeding bad blood. And I thinking that now I could buy some tow! There's my tow slipped through my fingers. That gentleman, and a nice

gentleman he is, gave me ten francs. Well, for one thing, my otter has gone up in value now since this happened."

Charles put so little belief in Daddy Fourchon that he took these lamentations, which for once were full of a very real feeling, for part of the preparation of a "try on," as he called it, in the language of the servants' hall, and he made a blunder by betraying his opinion in a smile, which the spiteful old man saw at once.

"Look here, Daddy Fourchon, you must behave yourself, eh? You will speak to madame in a moment," said Charles, who noticed the profusion of brilliant carbuncles on the old man's nose and cheeks.

"I know what I am about, Charles, as you shall see. And if you will undertake to give me some of the scraps left over from breakfast and a couple of bottles of Spanish wine in the kitchen, I will tell you in three words how to escape a drubbing——"

"Tell me, and Francois shall have the master's orders to give you a glass of wine," said the footman.

"Is it a bargain?"

"A bargain."

"All right. You shall have a word or two with Catherine under the bridge over the Avonne. Godain is in love with her, he has seen you together, and he is stupid enough to be jealous. Stupid, I say, because a peasant has no business with sentiment, that is for rich people. So if you go to Soulanges for a dance with her at the Tivoli on the fete day, you will be made to dance more than you think for! Godain is miserly, and has a nasty temper; he is just the one to break your arm, and you could not summons him for it——"

"Too dear! Catherine is a fine girl, but she is not worth *that*," said Charles. "And, pray, what makes Godain take it amiss? The others don't."

"Oh! he's enough in love with her to marry her."

"There is a woman that will be beaten!" said Charles.

"That is as may be," returned the grandfather. "Tonsard never lifted a hand against her mother, so frightened he was that she should go off and leave him, and Catherine takes after her mother. A wife that can bestir herself is worth a good deal. And, beside, at a game of hot cockles with Catherine, Godain, strong though he is, would not come off best."

"Wait, Daddy Fourchon, here are forty sous for you to drink to my health in case we mayn't be able to get a sup of Alicante."

Old Fourchon looked away as he pocketed the money, lest Charles should see the ironical glee in his eyes, which he could not hide.

"Catherine is a rare wench for a glass," said the old man; "she is fond of malaga; you ought to tell her to come to the Aigues for some, you ninny!"

Charles looked at old Fourchon with undisguised admiration; why should he guess how immensely important it was to the general's enemies to introduce one more spy into the house.

"The general must be pleased," the old man went on; "the peasants are keeping very quiet. What does he say about it? Is he still quite satisfied with Sibilet?"

"Nobody gives Sibilet any trouble except Michaud; they say he will contrive to make him lose his place."

"Two of a trade!" commented old Fourchon. "I'll lay to it that you yourself would be glad to see Francois turned off to step into his place."

"Lord, Francois gets twelve hundred francs," said Charles; "but they won't turn him away, he knows the general's secrets——"

"Just as Ma'am Michaud knew my lady's, eh?" said Fourchon, eyeing Charles keenly. "Look here, my lad, do you know whether the general and my lady have rooms apart?" he added.

"Of course, or the master would not be so fond of madame as he is."

"Don't you know any more?" asked Fourchon; but no more could be said, for by this time the pair were under the kitchen windows.

V.

THE ENEMIES FACE TO FACE.

As soon as breakfast was begun, Francois, the first valet-de-chambre, came to Blondet, saying in a low voice, but quite loud enough to be overheard by the count, "Fourchon's little boy says that they caught the otter at last, sir, and he wants to know if you would like to have the animal before taking it to the sub-prefect at Ville-aux-Fayes."

Emile Blondet, pastmaster in mystification, flushed red in spite of himself, like a girl who hears an equivocal anecdote and understands the drift of it.

"Aha! you have been out otter-hunting with old Fourchon this morning!" cried the general, bursting into a roar of laughter.

"What is it?" asked the countess, disconcerted by her husband's hilarity.

"When a clever man like Blondet lets old Fourchon take him in, an old cuirassier need not blush to have gone hunting that same otter, who looks uncommonly like the third horse which you never see and always pay for when you travel post."

And in a voice broken by peals of laughter, the general managed to add, "After that, I do not wonder that you changed your boots and trousers, you must have been made to swim. As for me, I was not hoaxed quite so far as you. I stopped on the bank—but then you are so much cleverer than I am——"

"You forget, dear, that I do not know what you are talking about," put in Mme. de Montcornet, with a trace of pique,

caused by Blondet's confusion. At this the general recovered his gravity, and Blondet himself told the story of his otter hunt.

"But if they really have an otter," said the countess, "they are not so much to blame, poor things."

"Yes; only no one has seen the otter for these ten years!" returned the pitiless general.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Francois, "the child vows and declares that he has caught one——"

"If they have an otter, I will pay them for it," said the general.

"Providence can never have condemned the Aigues to be without otters for ever," put in the Abbé Brossette.

"Oh, Monsieur le Curé, if you let loose Providence upon us——" exclaimed Blondet.

"But who can have come?" the countess asked quickly.

"Mouche, my lady, the little boy that always goes about with old Fourchon," the servant answered.

"Send him in—if madame has no objection," said the general. "He will perhaps amuse you."

"But at any rate we ought to know what to believe, ought we not?" asked the countess.

A few moments later Mouche appeared in his almost naked condition. At this apparition in the splendid dining-room of poverty personified when the price of a single mirror on the walls would have been a fortune to the barefooted, barelegged, bareheaded child, it was impossible not to give way to charitable impulses. Mouche's eyes, like glowing coals, gazed from the glories of the room to the riches on the table.

"You have no mother, of course?" said the countess, unable to explain such destitution in any other way.

"No, my lady; mammy died of fretting because daddy went for a soldier in 1812, and she never saw him again; he did not marry her with the papers before he went, and he was frozen, saving your presence. But I have my Grandad Four-

chon, who is very good to me, though he does beat me now and again like a Jesus."

"How does it happen, dear, that any one on your land is so wretched?" asked the countess, looking at the general.

"No one need be wretched here, Madame la Comtesse, unless they choose," said the curé. "Monsieur le Comte means well by them, but you have to do with a people without religion, people who have but one idea—how to live at your expense."

"But, my dear curé," said Blondet, "you are here to keep them in order."

"My lord bishop sent me here as a missionary among heathen, monsieur," said the Abbé Brossette; "but, as I had the honor of pointing out to him, our heathen in France are unapproachable; they make it a rule not to listen to us; now in America you can appeal to the savages."

"M'sieu le Curé, they do a little for me now, but if I went to your church they would give over helping me altogether. I should have them calling 'shovel hats' after me," interjected Mouche.

"But religion ought to begin by giving him trousers, my dear abbé," said Blondet. "Do not your missions begin by coaxing the savage?"

"He would have sold his clothes before long," the abbé answered, lowering his voice, "and my stipend does not allow me to traffic in souls in that way."

"Monsieur le Curé is right," said the general, who was looking at Mouche. The urchin's tactics consisted in feigning ignorance wherever he had the worst of it.

"The little rascal is evidently intelligent enough to know right from wrong," continued the general. "He is old enough to work, and his one thought is how to transgress and escape punishment. He is well known to the foresters. Before I was mayor he knew, young as he was, that if a man is witness of a trespass on his own land, he cannot lodge a com-

plaint himself, and he would brazenly stay in my meadows grazing his cows under my eyes; now, he makes off."

"Oh! that is very wrong," said the countess; "we ought not to take other people's goods, dear child."

"One must eat, my lady. Grandad gives me more cuffs than crusts, and it makes you feel hollow inside, does a hiding. When the cows have milk, I help myself to a little, and that keeps life in me. Is his lordship so poor that he can't spare a little grass so that I may drink?"

"Why, perhaps he has had nothing to eat to-day," said the countess, touched by such dire poverty. "Just let him have some bread and the rest of the fowl; give him some breakfast, in fact," she said, looking at the servant. "Where do you sleep?" she added.

"Anywhere, wherever they will let us sleep in the winter, my lady, and out of doors in the summer."

"How old are you?"

"Twelve."

"Then something might be made of him yet," said the countess, turning to her husband.

"Might make a soldier," said the general gruffly; "he is in good training for it. I myself have been through quite as much of that sort of thing as he has, and yet here I am."

"Asking your pardon, general, I am not on the register," said the child. "I shall not be drawn. My poor mother was not married, and I was born out in the fields; I am a son of the 'airth,' as grandad says. Mammy saved me from the militia. I don't call myself Mouche any more than anything else. Grandad showed me plainly where I was well off. The Government haven't got me on their *papers*, and when I am old enough to be drawn I shall go on my travels through France. They won't catch *me!*"

"Do you love your grandfather?" asked the countess, trying to read the heart of twelve years old.

"Lord, he cuffs me whenever the fit takes him, but there is

no help for it. He is so funny, such a good sort! And then he says that he is taking pay for teaching me to read and write."

"Can you read?" asked the count.

"I should think I could, Monsieur le Comte, and fine writing too! true as it is that we have an otter!"

"What is this?" the count asked, holding out a newspaper.

"The *Cu-o-ti-dienne*," pronounced Mouche, without stumbling more than three times over the word. Everybody, even the Abbé Brossette, joined in the laugh that followed.

"Well," cried Mouche sulkily, "you are setting me to read them newspapers, and grandad says that they are written for rich people, but you always get to know later on what there is inside them."

"The child is right, general; he makes me long to meet the man who got the better of me this morning once again," said Blondet; "I see that there was a touch of Mouche in his hoax."

Mouche understood perfectly well that he was there for the master's amusement. Old Fourchon's scholar showed himself worthy of his master; he began to cry.

"How can you make fun of a barefooted child?" asked the countness.

"A child who thinks it quite natural that his grandfather should take out his pay for his schooling in slaps?" asked Blondet.

"Poor little one, look here," said the lady; "have you caught an otter?"

"Yes, my lady, as true as that you are the prettiest lady I have seen or ever shall see," said the child, wiping away his tears.

"Just let us see this otter," said the general.

"Oh, M'sieu le Comte, grandad hid her away; but she was still kicking when we were at the rope-walk. You can send for my grandad, for he wants to sell her himself."

"Take him to the kitchen and give him his breakfast, and send Charles for old Fourchon meanwhile," the countess bade Francois. "And see if you can find some shoes and trousers and a jacket for the boy. Those who come here naked must go away again clothed——"

"God bless you, dear lady," said Mouche as he went. "M'sieu le Curé may be sure that the clothes *you* give me will be laid up for high days and holidays."

Emile and Mme. de Montcornet exchanged glances. This last remark surprised them. "That boy is not so silly," their looks seemed to tell the curé.

"Certainly, madame," said the curé as soon as the boy had gone, "you cannot call a reckoning with poverty. To my thinking, the poor have justifications which God alone can see and take into account, justifications in physical causes which often produce baleful results, and other justifications springing from character, produced by tendencies, blameworthy as we think, but yet the result of qualities which, unfortunately for society, find no outlet. The miracles worked on battlefields have taught us that the lowest scoundrel may have the makings of a hero in him. But here you are placed in a very unusual position; and if reflection does not keep pace with benevolence, you run the risk of subsidizing your enemies——"

"*Enemies?*" echoed the countess.

"Bitter enemies," the general spoke gravely.

"Old Fourchon and his son-in-law Tonsard represent the whole intelligence of the poorest folk in the valley; their advice is asked and taken in the most trifling matters. Their Machiavellism reaches an incredible pitch. You may take this for granted, that ten peasants in a wineshop are the small change for a big intrigue——"

As he was speaking, Francois announced Monsieur Sibilet, the steward.

"This is the minister of finance," said the general, smiling;

"send him in. He will explain the gravity of the situation to you," he added, glancing from his wife to Blondet.

"And so much the better in that he will scarcely make the least of it," said the curé, in a hardly audible voice.

Blondet saw for the first time a personage whose acquaintance he wished to make—the steward of the Aigues, of whom he had heard much since his arrival. Sibilet was a man of thirty or thereabouts; he was of middle height, with a sullen, unpleasant face, which a laugh seemed to suit ill. The eyes of changing green, under an anxious brow, looked different ways, and thus disguised his thoughts. His long, straight hair gave him a somewhat clerical appearance; he wore a brown greatcoat and a black vest and trousers; he was knock-kneed, and the trousers imperfectly concealed this defect.

In spite of his unwholesome appearance, sallow complexion, and flabby muscles, Sibilet had a strong constitution. The somewhat gruff tones of his voice harmonized with the generally unprepossessing appearance of the man.

Blondet and the Abbé Brossette exchanged a furtive glance, and in the fleeting expression in the eyes of the young ecclesiastic Blondet read the confirmation of his own suspicions.

"You set down the peasants' thefts at about one-fourth the value of the yearly returns, do you not, my dear Sibilet?" asked the general.

"At a good deal more than that, Monsieur le Comte," returned the steward. "Your paupers take more than the Government asks of you. There is a young rogue called Mouche who gleans his two bushels per day; and old women, whom any one would think at their last gasp, will recover health and youth and the use of their limbs at harvest-time. That is a phenomenon which you can see for yourself," continued Sibilet, turning to Blondet, "for we shall begin in six days' time; the rain in July has made the harvest late this year. We shall be cutting the rye next week. Nobody ought to glean without a certificate of poverty from the mayor of the

commune, and a commune ought on no account to allow any but the very poor to glean at all, but all the communes in the district glean over each other without certificates. For sixty poor people in the commune, there are forty more who will not do a day's work; and, as a matter of fact, even those who have set up for themselves will leave their work to glean in the fields or the vineyards.

"Here these folk will pick up three hundred bushels a day among them, and the harvest lasts a fortnight—four thousand five hundred bushels taken away in the canton. So the gleaning amounts to about one-tenth of the whole harvest; and as to the abuse of grazing, that makes a hole in our profits, about a sixth of the value of our meadows goes in that way. Then there are the woods, they do incalculable mischief there, cutting down the young saplings six years old. The damage done to your estate, Monsieur le Comte, mounts up to twenty and some odd thousand francs per annum."

"Well, madame," said the general, "do you hear that?"

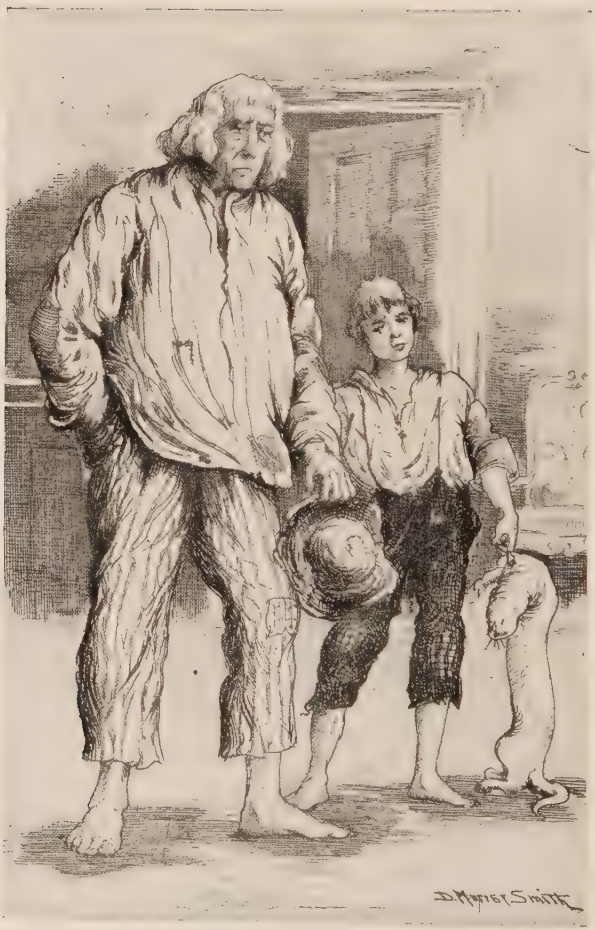
"Is it not exaggerated?" asked Mme. de Montcornet.

"No, unhappily it is not, madame," said the curé. "There is poor Father Niseron, the white-haired old man who unites in person all the offices of bellringer, beadle, sexton, sacristan, and chanter, in spite of his republican opinions—in fact, he is the grandfather of that little Geneviève whom you placed under Madame Michaud——"

"La Péchina!" said Sibilet, interrupting the abbé.

"La Péchina?" asked the countess. "What do you mean?"

"Madame la Comtesse, when you saw little Geneviève by the wayside looking so forlorn, you exclaimed in Italian: *Piccina!* And now it has become a nickname, and so corrupted that the whole commune knows your protege by the name of the *Péchina*. She is the only one who comes to church, poor little thing, with Mesdames Michaud and Sibilet," added the curé.


D. Napier Smith

FOURCHON AND MOUCHE.

"Yes, and she is none the better off for that," said the steward. "She is persecuted for her religion."

"Well," continued the curé, "this poor old man of seventy-two picks up a bushel and a half in a day, and does it honestly moreover, but he is too conscientious to sell his gleanings as the rest of them do; he keeps the grain for his own consumption. As a favor to me, Monsieur Langlumé, your deputy, grinds his corn for nothing, and my servant bakes his bread with mine."

"I had forgotten my little protege," said the countess, startled by Sibilet's remarks. "Your coming has put other things out of my head," she added, turning to Blondet. "But after breakfast we will go to the Avonne gate, and I will show you a living woman like a fifteenth-century painter's dream."

As she spoke, a pair of cracked sabots was put down with a clatter at the kitchen door, and old Fourchon was announced by Francois. The countess nodded permission, and Francois brought the old man into the room, Mouche following behind with his mouth full, and holding the otter by a string tied to its yellow paws, ribbed like a duck's foot. Old Fourchon glanced at the gentry seated at table, gave Sibilet the half-defiant, half-servile look that veils a peasant's thoughts; then he brandished the amphibian triumphantly.

"Here her is!" he cried, looking at Blondet.

"That is my otter though," demurred the Parisian; "I paid plenty for it."

"Oh, your otter got away, my dear sir!" retorted old Fourchon. "She is in her hole at this minute; she had no mind to come out of it; her was the female, while this here is the male! Mouche saw it come out, a long way off, after you had gone. 'Tis as true as that Monsieur le Comte covered himself with glory along with his Cuirassiers at Waterloo! The otter is as much mine as the Aigues belongs to his lordship the general. But for twenty francs the otter is yours,

apostle; he digs graves for the dead, and I set the living a-dancing. He has dined with Duke Humphrey [gone hungry], while I have tippled down the liquor like a rollicking devil-may-care creature. And one has come just as far as the other; we have the same snow on our heads, the same cash in our pockets, he rings the bell, and I make the rope. He is a Republican and I am a sinner, and not even a publican. Let the peasant do ill or well, according to your notions, he will end as he began, in rags, and you in fine linen——"

Nobody interrupted old Fourchon, who seemed to owe his eloquence to the bottled wine; at the outset Sibilet tried to cut him short, but at a sign from Blondet the steward was dumb. The curé, the general, and the countess gathered from the journalist's glances that he wished to study the problem of pauperism from the life, and, perhaps, to be quits with old Fourchon.

"And what do you mean about Mouche's education? How do you set to work to bring him up to be a better child to you than your daughters?"

"Does he so much as speak to him of God?" asked the curé.

"Oh! not I, Môsieur le Curé, I be'ant telling him to fear God, but *men*. God is good, and has promised, according to you parsons, that we shall have the kingdom of heaven, as the rich keep the kingdom of earth. I say to him—'Mouche! fear the jail! for you go out of jail to the scaffold. Never steal anything; make them give you what you want! Stealing leads to murder, and murder brings down the justice of men on you. The razor of justice—that is to be feared; it secures the rich man's slumber against the poor man that lies awake. Learn to read. Education will put it in your power to make money under cover of the law, like clever Monsieur Gaubertin. You will be a steward, eh! like Monsieur Sibilet, whom his lordship the count allows his rations. The great thing is to keep well with the rich; there are crumbs under rich men's

tables. That is what I call a fine education and thorough, too. So the young whelp keeps on this side of the law. He will be a steady boy; he will take care of me!"

"And what will you make of him?" inquired Blondet.

"A gentleman's servant, to begin with," answered Fourchon, "because seeing the masters from near, his education will be thoroughly finished, that it will! Good example will teach him to make his way with the law to back him like the rest of you! If his lordship will take him into his stables to learn to rub down the horses, the little fellow will be very much pleased—seeing that though he fears men, he is not afraid of animals."

"You are a clever man, Daddy Fourchon," began Blondet. "You know quite well what you are saying, and there is some sense in what you say."

"Oh! my certy! no, I have left my senses at the Grand-I-Vert along with my two five-franc pieces."

"How came such a man as you to drift into such poverty? For as things are now, a peasant has only himself to thank if he does badly; he is free, he can become rich. It is not as it used to be any longer. If a peasant can scrape a little money together, he finds a bit of land, he can buy it, and he is his own master."

"I saw the old times, and I see the new, my dear learned sir," replied Fourchon; "they have put up a new signboard, but the liquor is the same as ever. To-day is only yesterday's younger brother. There! you put that in your paper! Enfranchised, are we? We still belong to the same village, and the *seigneur* (lord) is there still; I call him Hard Labor. The hoe, which is all our property, has not passed out of our hands. And anyhow, whether we work for the *seigneur* or for the tax-collector, who takes the best part of what we make, we have to sweat our lives out——"

"But why not choose a handicraft and try your luck elsewhere?" asked Blondet.

"Are you talking to me of setting out to seek my fortune? But where should I go? I must have a passport, which costs forty sous, before I can go out of the department. These forty years I have not been able to hear a slut of a two-franc piece jangle with another in my pocket. If you go straight before you, for every village you come to you want a three-franc piece, and there are not many of the Fourchon family that have the wherewithal to visit six villages! Nothing drags us from our communes except the conscription. And what does the army do for us! The colonel lives on the common soldier as the master lives on the laborer. Does one colonel out of a hundred spring from our loins? In the army, as in the rest of the world, for one that grows rich a hundred drop out. For want of what? God knows—so do the money-lenders.

"So the best thing we can do is to stop in our communes, where we are penned up like sheep by the force of circumstances, just as we used to be by the *seigneurs*. And I care not a rap who nails me here. Nailed down by necessity, or nailed down by the nobles, we are condemned for life to labor on the soil. Wherever we are, we turn up the soil, and dig it and dung it, and work for you that are born rich, as we are born poor. The mass will always be the same; what it is, it always is. Those of us who go up in the world are fewer than those of you who come down. We know this very well, if we haven't book-learning, that it won't do to be down upon us at every moment. We leave you in peace; let us live. Otherwise, if this goes on, you will be forced to feed us in your prisons, where we are far more comfortable than on our straw. You are our masters, and you mean to remain so; we shall always be enemies, to-day as for these last thirty years. You have everything, we have nothing, so you cannot expect us to be your friends yet."

"That is what is called a declaration of war," said the general.

"When the Aigues belonged to the poor lady that is gone (the Lord have mercy on her soul, for she was a wanton singer in her youth) we were well off, your lordship. Her let us pick up a living in her fields, and take our firing in her forests; her was none the poorer for that! And you, that are at least as rich as she was, hunt us down like wild beasts, nor more nor less, and drag the poor people before the magistrate. Ah, well! no good will come of that. You will have some ugly doings laid at your door. I have just seen your forester, that curmudgeon of a Vatel, all but kill a poor old woman about a stick of firewood. They will make an enemy of the people of you; they will grow bitter against you at 'up-sittings' as they work and talk; they will curse you as heartily as they used to bless madame that is gone. The poor man's curse grows, your lordship; it grows higher than the biggest of your oak-trees, and the oak-tree grows into the gallows-tree. Nobody here tells you the truth; this is truth that I am telling you! Death may come to me any morning; I have not much to lose by letting you have the truth for less than market price. I play tunes along with Vermichel for the peasants to dance to at the Café de la Paix at Soulanges; I hear their talk. Well, then, there is a bad feeling toward you; they will make the country too hot to hold you. If your damned Michaud doesn't turn over a new leaf, they will force you to turn him away!" Then, after a moment's pause: "There, now! the advice and the otter are cheap at twenty francs——"

As old Fourchon delivered himself of these final remarks, a man's footsteps sounded outside, and the object of his menaces suddenly appeared unannounced. It was easy to see that the threat had reached Michaud's ears from the look which he gave the orator of the poor. Old Fourchon's impudence forsook him; he looked like a thief confronted with the policeman. He knew that he had made a mistake, and that Michaud had, as it were, a right to call him to account, for

an outpouring evidently meant to intimidate the dwellers at the Aigues.

"Behold the minister of war," said the general, addressing Blondet, with a gesture that indicated Michaud.

"I beg your pardon, madame, for coming into the room without asking your leave," remarked the minister, "but I must speak to the general on urgent business."

While Michaud made his apologies he watched Sibilet. The joy of the man's heart at Fourchon's bold tone expanded over his visage, unnoticed by any of those who sat at the table, who were interested in no small degree by the otter hunter. But Michaud, who, for reasons of his own, was always on the watch with Sibilet, was struck with the expression of the steward's face.

"He has certainly earned his twenty francs, as he says, Monsieur le Comte," cried Sibilet; "the otter is not dear."

"Give him twenty francs," said the general, addressing his valet.

"Are you really taking it from me?" Blondet asked him.

"I will have the animal stuffed," cried the count.

"Oh! your lordship, that kind gentleman would have let me have the skin!" protested old Fourchon.

"Very well," said the countess. "You shall have five francs for the skin, but you can go now——"

The strong, rank odor of the two dwellers on the highway tainted the air of the room, and so offended Mme. de Montcornet's delicate senses that, if the pair had stayed there much longer, the lady would have been obliged to go. It was solely to this inconvenient quality that Fourchon owed his twenty-five francs. He went out, still eyeing Michaud fearfully, and making him obeisances without end.

"What I been telling his lordship, Mister Michaud," said he, "was for your good."

"Or for the good of them that you take pay of," said Michaud, looking him through and through.

"Bring coffee and leave us," the general ordered; "and before all things, shut the doors."

Blondet had not yet seen the head-forester at the Aigues; his first impression was very different from that just made upon him by Sibilet. Michaud inspired confidence and esteem as great as the repulsion excited by Sibilet.

The head-forester's face caught your attention at once by its shapely outlines—the oval contours were as delicately moulded as the profile, a regularity of feature seldom found in an ordinary Frenchman. Yet, in spite of this regularity of feature, the face was not lacking in character, perhaps by reason of its harmonious coloring, in which red and tawny tints prevailed, indications of physical courage. The clear, brown eyes were bright and keen, unfaltering in the expression of thought, and looked you straight in the face. The broad, open brow was set still further in relief by thick, black hair. There was a wrinkle here and there, traced by the profession of arms, on the fine face lit up by loyalty, decision, and self-reliance. If any doubt or suspicion entered his mind, it could be read there at once. His figure, still slender and shapely, as is the case with the men picked out for a crack regiment of cavalry, was such that the head-forester might be described as a strapping fellow. Michaud kept his mustaches, whiskers, and a beard beneath the chin; altogether, he recalled a military type which a deluge of patriotic prints and pictures has made almost ridiculous. The defect of the type is its over-abundance in the French army; but, perhaps, this uniformity of physiognomy has its origin in the continuity of emotions, the hardships of camp life, from which no rank is exempt, and the fact that the same efforts are made on the field of battle by officers and men alike.

Michaud was dressed in dark blue from head to foot; he still wore the black satin stock and soldiers' boots, just as he held himself somewhat stiffly, with his shoulders set back and chest expanded, as if he still bore arms. The red ribbon of

the Legion of Honor adorned his buttonhole. And (to add a final trait of character to a sketch of the mere outside of the man) while the steward, since he had come into office, had never omitted the formula "Monsieur le Comte" in addressing his patron, Michaud had never called his master by any name but "the general."

Once again Blondet exchanged a significant glance with the Abbé Brossette. "What a contrast!" he seemed to say, as he looked from the steward to the head-forester. Then, that he might learn whether the man's character, thoughts, and words were such as his face and stature might lead you to expect, he looked full at Michaud, saying—

"I say! I was out early this morning, and found your foresters still abed!"

"At what time!" asked the old soldier uneasily.

"At half-past seven."

Michaud gave his general an almost mischievous glance.

"And through which gate did you go out?" asked Michaud.

"The Conches gate. The keeper in his shirt took a look at me from the window," answered Blondet.

"Gaillard had just gone to bed, no doubt," replied Michaud. "When you told me that you had gone out early, I thought that you were up before sunrise, and if my forester had gone home so early, he must have been ill; but at half-past seven he would be going to bed. We are up all night," Michaud added, after a pause, by way of answer to a look of astonishment from the countess; "but this vigilance of ours is always at fault. You have just given twenty-five francs to a man who a few minutes ago was quietly helping to hide the traces of a theft committed on your property this very morning. In fact, as soon as the general is ready, we must talk it over, for something must be done——"

"You are always full of your rights, my dear Michaud, and *summum jus, summa injuria.* If you do not concede a point, you will make trouble for yourself," said Sibilet. "I should

have liked you to hear old Fourchon talking just now when wine had loosened his tongue a little."

"He frightened me!" exclaimed the countess.

"He said nothing that I have not known for a long time," said the general.

"Oh! the rascal was not drunk, he played a part, for whose benefit? Perhaps you know?" Michaud suggested, looking steadily at Sibilet. The steward reddened under his gaze.

"Oh! the trick!" cried Blondet, looking out of the corner of his eye at the abbé.

"The poor people suffer," said the countess; "there was some truth in what old Fourchon has just shrieked at us, for it cannot be said that he *spoke*."

"Madame," answered Michaud, "do you think that the Emperor's soldiers lay in roses for fourteen years? The general is a count, he is a grand officer of the Legion of Honor, he has had grants of land made him; do I show any jealousy of him, I that have fought as he has? Have I any wish to cavil at his fame, to steal his land, or to refuse him the honor due his rank? The peasant ought to obey as the soldier obeys; he should have a soldier's loyalty, his respect for privileges won by other men, and try to rise to be an officer, by fair means, by his own exertions, and not by knavery. The sword and the ploughshare are twin brothers. And in the soldier's lot there is one thing that the peasant has not: death hovering overhead at every hour."

"That is what I would like to tell them from the pulpit," cried the Abbé Brossette.

"Concessions?" the head-forester went on, in answer to Sibilet's challenge. "I would concede quite ten per cent. on the gross returns from the Aigues, but the way things go now, the general loses thirty per cent.; and if Monsieur Sibilet is paid so much per cent. on the receipts, I do not understand his concessions, for he pretty benevolently submits to a loss of ten or twelve hundred francs a year."

"My dear Monsieur Michaud," retorted Sibilet in a surly tone, "I have told Monsieur le Comte that I would rather lose twelve hundred francs than my life. Think it seriously over; I keep on telling you——"

"*Life!*" cried the countess; "can it be a question of any one's life?"

"We ought not to discuss affairs of the State here," said the general, laughing. "All this means, madame, that Sibilet, in his quality of finance minister, is timid and cowardly, while my minister of war is brave, and, like his general, fears nothing."

"Say prudent, Monsieur le Comte?" cried Sibilet, addressing the general.

"Come, now, are we really surrounded by snares set for us by savages like the heroes of Fenimore Cooper's novels in the backwoods of America?"

"O, but! your statesmanship, gentlemen, consists in understanding how to govern without alarming us by the creaking of the machinery of government," said Mme. de Montcornet.

"Ah! Madame la Comtesse, perhaps it is a needful thing that you should know what one of your pretty caps costs in sweat here," said the curé.

"No, for then I might very well do without them, look respectfully at a five-franc piece, and grow a miser, as all country people do, and I should lose too much by it," said the countess, laughing. "Here, my dear abbé, give me your arm; let us leave the general with his two ministers, and go to the Avonne gate to see Madame Michaud. I have not made a call upon her since I came; it is time to look after my little protege."

And the pretty woman went for thick shoes and a hat; Sibilet's fears, Mouche and Fourchon, their rags, and the hate in their eyes, were already forgotten.

The Abbé Brossette and Blondet, obedient to the mistress

of the house, followed her out of the room, and waited for her on the terrace in front of the castle.

"What do you think of all this?" Blondet asked his companion.

"I am a pariah. I am watched by spies as the common enemy. Every moment now I am obliged to keep the ears and eyes of prudence wide open, or I should fall into some of the snares they set so as to rid themselves of me," said the officiating priest. "Between ourselves, it has come to this, I ask myself whether they will not shoot me down——"

"And you stay on?" asked Blondet.

"A man no more deserts the cause of God than the cause of the Emperor!" the priest answered, with a simplicity which impressed Blondet. He grasped the priest's hand cordially.

"So you must see," the abbé continued, "that I am not in a position to know anything of all that is brewing. Still it seems to me that the people here have 'a spite against' the general, as they say in Artois and Belgium."

Something must here be said about the curé of Blangy.

The abbé, the fourth son of a good middle-class family in Autun, was a clever man, carrying his head high on the score of his cloth. Short and thin though he was, he redeemed the insignificance of his appearance by that air of hard-headedness which sits not ill on a Burgundian. He had accepted a subordinate position through devotion, for his religious conviction had been backed by political conviction. There was something in him of the priest of other times; he had a passionate belief in the church and his order; he looked at things as a whole; his ambition was untainted by selfishness. *Serve* was his motto, to serve the church and the monarchy at the point where danger threatens most, to serve in the ranks, like the soldier who feels within himself that his desire to acquit himself well and his courage must bring him, sooner or later, a general's command. He faltered in none of his vows of

poverty, chastity, and obedience, acquitting himself in these respects, as in all the other duties of his position, with a simplicity and cheerfulness that is the unmistakable sign of an upright nature, in which natural instincts make for right as well as strong and earnest religious conviction.

This remarkable churchman saw at the first glance that Blondet was attracted to the countess, saw also that with a daughter of the house of Troisville, and a man of letters, who supported the Monarchy, it behooved him to show himself a man of the world, for the dignity of the cloth. He came to make a fourth at whist almost every evening. Emile Blondet was able to appreciate the Abbé Brossette, and paid him marked deference, so that the two men felt attracted to each other; for every clever man is delighted to meet with an equal, or, if you prefer it, an audience, and there is a natural affinity between sword and scabbard.

"But now, Monsieur l'Abbé, you whose earnestness has placed you below your proper level, what, in your opinion, has brought about this state of things?"

"I do not like to give you platitudes after that flattering parenthesis," said the abbé, smiling. "The things that are happening in this valley are happening everywhere in France. It is all the outcome of the hopes and tendencies of 1789; they have filtered down, so to speak, into the peasants' minds. The Revolution affected some districts much more deeply than others; and in this strip of Burgundy lying so near to Paris, the significance of that movement was felt to be the triumph of the Gaul over the Frank. Historically, the peasants are still on the morrow of the Jacquerie; their defeat sank deeply into their minds. The facts have been long forgotten, but the idea has become instinctive in them. It is as much in the blood of the peasant as pride of birth was once in the blood of the noble. So the Revolution of 1789 was the revenge of the vanquished. The peasants have entered upon the ownership of the soil, a possession forbidden to them by feudal law

for twelve hundred years. Hence their love of the land; they divide it up among themselves till a single furrow is cut in half. It not seldom happens that they pay no taxes, for the property is so exceedingly small that it will not cover the costs of prosecution for arrears."

"Their wrong-headedness, their suspiciousness, if you will," Blondet broke in upon the abbé, "in this respect is so great that in a thousand cantons out of three thousand in France, it is impossible for a rich man to buy land of a peasant. They will let or sell their bits of ground among themselves, but they will not give it up to a well-to-do farmer on any consideration whatever. The more the great landowner offers, the more their vague suspicions increase. Expropriation is the only means by which the peasant's holdings can be brought under the common law of the land. Plenty of people have noticed this fact, but they see no reason for it."

"This is the reason," said the Abbé Brossette, rightly considering that with Blondet a pause was a sort of interrogation. "Twelve centuries are as nothing to a caste which has never been diverted from its principal idea by the historical spectacle of civilization, a caste which still proudly wears the noble's broad-brimmed silk-bound hat since the day when it fell out of fashion and was abandoned to the peasants. The enthusiasm in the depths of the hearts of the people, which centred itself passionately on the figure of Napoleon (who never understood the secret of it as thoroughly as he imagined), sprang solely from this idea, which may perhaps explain the portent of his return in 1815—Napoleon, bound to the people by a million of common soldiers (first and last), is even yet, in their eyes, the king of the people, sprung from the loins of the Revolution, the man who confirmed them in the possession of the national lands. The oil at his coronation was saturated with this idea——"

"An idea which the year 1814 disturbed with unfortunate results, an idea which the Monarchy should regard as sacred,"

Blondet said quickly; "for the people may find beside the throne a prince to whom his father left the head of Louis XVI. as part of his inheritance."

"Hush, here comes the countess," said the Abbé Brossette. "Fourchon frightened her, and we must keep her here in the interests of religion, of the throne, nay, of the country itself."

Michaud, as head-forester, had doubtless come to report the injury done to Vatel's eyes. But before reporting the deliberations of the Council of State, the reader must be put in possession of a sequence of facts, a concise account of the circumstances under which the general bought the Aigues, and of the weighty reasons which determined Sibilet's appointment to the stewardship of the fine estate, together with an explanation of Michaud's installation as head-forester; in short, of all the antecedent facts that had brought people's minds into their present attitude, and given rise to the fears expressed by Sibilet.

There will be a farther advantage in this rapid sketch, in that it will introduce several of the principal actors of the drama, give an outline of their interests, and set forth the dangers of the Comte de Montcornet's position.

VI.

A TALE OF ROBBERS.

In 1791, or thereabouts, Mlle. Laguerre came on a visit to her country house, and accepted as her new agent the son of an ex-steward of the neighboring manor of Soulanges.

The little town of Soulanges at this day is simply the market-town of the district, though it was once the capital of a considerable county in the days when the House of Burgundy waged war against the House of France. Ville-aux-Fayes, now the seat of the sub-prefecture, was a mere petty fief in

those days, a dependency of Soulanges, like the Aigues, Ronquerolles, Cerneux, Conches, and fifteen hamlets beside; but the Soulanges still bear a count's coronet, while the Ronquerolles of to-day styles himself "Marquis," thanks to the intrigues of a court which raised the son of a Captain du Plessis to a dukedom over the heads of the first families of the Conquest. Which shows that towns, like families, have their vicissitudes.

The ex-steward's son, a penniless bachelor, succeeded an agent enriched by the spoils of thirty years of office. The agent had decided that a third share in the firm of Minoret would suit him better than the stewardship of the Aigues. The future victualer had recommended as his successor a young man who had been his responsible assistant for five years. Francois Gaubertin should cover his retreat, and, indeed, his pupil undertook (out of gratitude for his training) to obtain the late agent's discharge from Mlle. Laguerre, when he saw how the lady went in deadly terror of the Revolution.

Gaubertin senior, ex-steward of the manor of Soulanges and public accuser of the department, took the timorous operatic singer under his protection. She was "suspect" on the face of it, after her relations with the aristocracy; so the local Fouquier-Tinville got up a little comedy, an explosion of feeling against the stage-queen, in order to give his son a chance to play the part of deliverer. By these means, the young man obtained his predecessor's discharge, and citizeness Laguerre made Francois Gaubertin her prime minister, partly out of gratitude, partly from policy.

The future victualer of the armies of the Republic had not spoiled mademoiselle. He annually remitted about thirty thousand livres to her in Paris, whereas the Aigues must have brought in forty thousand at the very least. When, therefore, Francois Gaubertin promised her thirty-six thousand francs, the ignorant opera-girl was amazed.

If the fortune subsequently amassed by Francois Gaubertin is to be justified before the tribunal of probability, its history must be traced from the beginning. First of all, young Gaubertin obtained the post of mayor of Blangy through his father's influence; and thenceforward, in spite of the law, he demanded that all payments should be made to him in coin. It was in his power to strike down any one by the ruinous requisitions of the Republic, and he used his power to "terrorize" his debtors (to use the language of the time). Then the steward punctually remitted his mistress' dues in *assignats*,* so long as *assignats* were legal tender. If the finances of the country were the worse for the paper currency, at any rate it laid the foundation of many a private fortune.

In three years, between 1792 and 1795, young Gaubertin made a hundred and fifty thousand francs out of the Aigues, and speculated on the Paris money market. Mlle. Laguerre, embarrassed with her assignats, was obliged to coin money with her diamonds, hitherto useless. She sent them to Gaubertin, who sold them for her, and punctually remitted the money in coin. Mlle. Laguerre was so much touched by this piece of loyalty that from that time forth her belief in Gaubertin was as firm as her belief in Piccini.

In 1796, at the time of his marriage with citizeness Isaure Mouchon (a daughter of one of his father's old friends of the Convention), young Gaubertin possessed three hundred and fifty thousand francs in coin; and, as the Directory seemed to him to be likely to last, he determined that Mlle. Laguerre should pass the accounts of his five years' stewardship before he married, finding an excuse in that event in his life for the request.

"I shall be the father of a family," he said; "you know the sort of character an agent gets; my father-in-law is a Republican of Roman probity, and a man of influence moreover; I should like to show him that I am not unworthy of him."

* Paper money of the Republic.

Mlle. Laguerre expressed her satisfaction with Gaubertin's accounts in the most flattering terms.

At first the steward tried to check the peasants' depredations, partly to inspire confidence in Mlle. Laguerre, partly because he feared (and not without reason) that the returns would suffer, and that there would be a serious falling off in the timber merchant's tips. But by that time the sovereign people had learned to make pretty free everywhere; and the lady of the manor, beholding her kings at such close quarters, felt somewhat overawed by majesty, and signified to her Richelieu that, before all things, she most particularly desired to die in peace. The prima donna's income was so far too large for her needs that she suffered the most disastrous precedents. For instance, rather than take law proceedings, she allowed her neighbors to encroach upon her proprietary rights. She never looked beyond the high walls of her park; she knew that nothing would pass them to trouble her felicity; she wished for nothing but a quiet life, like the true philosopher that she was. What were a few thousand livres of income, more or less, or rebates on sales of wood demanded by the merchants, on the ground that the peasants had spoiled the trees, in the eyes of a thriftless, reckless opera-girl, whose income of a hundred thousand francs had cost her nothing but pleasure, who had just submitted without a murmur to lose forty out of sixty thousand francs a year?

"Eh!" cried she, with the easy good-nature of a quean of the bygone eighteenth century, "every one must live, even the Republic!"

Mlle. Cochet, terrible power, her woman and female vizier, had tried to open her mistress' eyes when she saw what an ascendency Gaubertin had gained over "my lady," as he called her from the first, in spite of revolutionary laws of equality; but Gaubertin (in his turn) opened the waiting-maid's eyes by producing a document purporting to be a "de-

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nunciation" sent to his father, the public accuser, wherein Mlle. Cochet was vehemently accused of being in correspondence with Pitt and Cobourg.

Thenceforward the two powers ruled with divided sway, but *à la Montgomery*—under the rose. La Cochet praised Gaubertin to Mlle. Laguerre, just as Gaubertin extolled La Cochet to his mistress. Moreover, the woman knew that her nest was feathered, and that she could sleep securely on her mistress' legacy of sixty thousand francs. Madame was so used to La Cochet that she could not do without her. The maid knew all the secrets of "dear mistress'" toilet; she had the knack of sending "dear mistress" to sleep of an evening with endless stories, and could awaken her in the morning with flattering words. In fact, La Cochet never saw any change in "dear mistress" until the day of her death, and when "dear mistress" lay in her coffin, probably thought that she looked better than ever.

The annual gains made by this pair, together with their salaries and perquisites, grew to be so considerable that the most affectionate relatives could not have been more attached than they to the excellent creature their mistress. Does any one yet know how well a knave can lull his dupe? No mother is so tender or so thoughtful for an idolized daughter as a practitioner of *tartufferie* (hypocrisy) for his milch cow. What limits are there to the success of *Tartufe* played on many a private stage? What is friendship in comparison? Molière died all too soon, he should have shown us the sequel —Orgon's despair, Orgon bored by his family and worried by his children, Orgon regretting Tartufe and his flatteries, muttering to himself, "Those were the good times!"

During the last eight years of Mlle. Laguerre's life she only received thirty out of the fifty thousand francs brought in by the Aigues. Gaubertin's reign ended in much the same way as the reign of his predecessor, though rents were higher and

prices had risen notably between 1791 and 1815, and Mlle. Laguerre's estate increased by continued purchases. But it was part of Gaubertin's plan to inherit the estate on his mistress' approaching death, and therefore he was obliged to invent and maintain a chronic state of bad times. La Cochet, initiated into this scheme, was to share in the benefits.

Now the stage-queen in exile possessed a supplementary income of twenty thousand livres from investments in consolidated government stock (note how admirably the language of politicians adapts itself to the humors of politics), and scarcely spent the aforesaid twenty thousand francs in a year, but she was amazed at the continual purchases of land made by the steward out of the surplus funds at his disposal. Never in her life before had she lived within her income; and now that her needs had shrunk with age, she mistook the symptoms, and credited Gaubertin and La Cochet with honesty.

"Two treasures!" she assured every one who came to see her.

Gaubertin, moreover, was careful of appearances; his accounts looked straightforward. All the rents were duly posted in the ledger; anything that could not fail to strike the actress' slender intelligence was definite, accurate, and precise, so far as figures went. But the steward took a percentage on all outgoing expenses, bargains about to be concluded, exploitations, contracts for repairs, and lawsuits which he devised. His mistress never looked into these details, and so it not seldom happened that an arrangement was made by which the buyers paid double the prices entered, and were bound over to silence by receiving a share of the spoils. This easiness on Gaubertin's part won general popularity for himself, and every one praised his mistress; for, beside being fleeced all round, she gave away a great deal of money.

"God preserve her, dear lady!" was the cry.

As a matter of fact, Mlle. Laguerre gave directly or indirectly to every one that asked of her. As a sort of Nemesis

of youth, the opera singer was plundered in her age, so deftly and so systematically that her pillagers kept within certain bounds, lest her eyes should be opened to all that went on, and she should be frightened into selling the Aigues and going back to Paris.

It was (alas!) in the interest of such plunderers as these that Paul-Louis Courier was murdered. He had made the blunder of announcing beforehand that he meant to take his wife away and sell his estate, on which many a Tourangeau Tonsard was living. With this fear before their eyes, the marauders at the Aigues only cut down young trees when driven to extremities, when, for instance, there were no branches left which they could reach with a bill-hook tied to a pole. For the sake of their own ill-gotten gains, they did not go out of their way to do damage; and yet, during the last years of Mlle. Laguerre's life, the abuse of wood-cutting reached most scandalous proportions. On certain moonlit nights no less than two hundred faggots would be bound in the woods; and as for gleaning in fields and vineyards, the Aigues lost (as Sibilet had just pointed out) about one-fourth of its produce in such ways.

Mlle. Laguerre forbade La Cochet to marry during her own lifetime, a piece of selfishness where dependents are concerned that may be remarked all the world over, and in its absurdity about on a par with the mania of those who clutch till their latest sigh at possessions which have long ceased to contribute to their enjoyment, at imminent risk of being poisoned by their impatient next-of-kin. So three weeks after Mlle. Laguerre was laid in the earth, Mlle. Cochet married a police sergeant at Soulanges, Soudry by name, a fine-looking man of forty-two, who had come to the Aigues almost every day to see her since the creation of the police force in 1800, and dined at least four days a week with Gaubertin and La Cochet.

All through madame's life she had had her meals served apart

and alone when she had no visitors. In spite of the familiar terms on which she lived with La Cochet and Gaubertin, neither of them was permitted to sit at table with the first pupil of the *Académie royale de musique et de danse* (Royal Academy of Music and Dancing), and to the very end she preserved her etiquette, her manner of dress, her rouge, her high-heeled pantofles, her carriage and servants, and divinity of the goddess. A goddess on the stage, a goddess of the town, though buried away in the country she was a goddess still; her memory is held in veneration there, dividing the honors very evenly with the court of Louis XVI. in the estimation of the "best society" of Soulanges.

The aforesaid Soudry, who paid court to La Cochet from the very first, was the owner of the nicest house in Soulanges and about six thousand francs, with a prospect of a retiring pension of four hundred francs. La Cochet, now Mme. Soudry, was a person of no little consequence in Soulanges. The retired lady's-maid was generally supposed to possess one of the largest fortunes in the little town of some twelve hundred inhabitants; but she never said a word about her savings, which were placed, together with Gaubertin's capital, in the hands of a wine merchant's commission agent in Paris, one Leclercq, who belonged to that part of the country, Gaubertin being his sleeping partner.

Great was the general astonishment when M. and Mme. Soudry, by their marriage-contract, legitimized a natural son of the bridegroom; to this boy, therefore, Mme. Soudry's fortune would in due course descend. On the day when he officially received a mother, he had just finished his law studies, and proposed to keep his terms so as to become a magistrate.

It is almost superfluous to add that there was a firm friendship between the Gaubertins and the Soudrys, a friendship which had its source in a mutual intelligence of twenty years' standing. Both sides were in duty bound till the end of their

days to give each other out "to Rome and the rest of the world" for the salt of the earth. This interest, based on a knowledge on either side of secret stains on the white garment of conscience, is one of the most indissoluble of all bonds. You who read this social drama are so sure of this, that, given the phenomenon of a lasting devotion which puts your egoism to the blush, you will say of the pair "that those two must have committed some crime together."

After twenty-five years of stewardship, the steward found that he could command six hundred thousand francs in coin, and La Cochet possessed about two hundred and fifty thousand. Dexterous and continual changes of investment did not a little to swell the capital deposited with the firm of Leclercq & Company on the Quai de Béthune in the Ile Saint-Louis (rivals of the famous house of Grandet), and helped to build up fortunes for the commission agent and Gaubertin. After Mlle. Laguerre's death, Leclercq, the head of the firm on the Quai de Béthune, asked for the steward's eldest daughter, Jenny, in marriage, and then it was that Gaubertin flattered himself that he saw how to make himself master of the Aigues. Twelve years previously a notary had set up at Soulanges through Gaubertin's influence, and in Maître Lupin's office the plot was hatched.

Lupin, a son of the Comte de Soulanges' late agent, had lent himself to all the various manœuvres, unhappily too common in out-of-the-way country places, by which important pieces of property change hands in a hole-and-corner sort of way (to use a popular expression—such methods, for example, as under-valuations of real estate, or putting up property for sale and fixing the reserve bid at one-half the actual value, or distributing unauthorized placards. Lately, so it is said, he has formed a society in Paris for blackmailing weavers of such schemes with threats of running prices up against them; but in 1816 the scorching glare of publicity, in which we live today, had not yet been turned on France, so those in the plot

might fairly reckon upon dividing the Aigues among them. It was a job arranged by La Cochet, the notary, and Gaubertin; the latter reserving in secret his own further scheme of buying out his confederates so soon as the land should be purchased in his name. Lupin chose the attorney, whom he instructed to make application to the court for leave to sell. This man had agreed to make over his practice to Gaubertin's son, and was waiting to receive payment, so that he had an interest in the spoliation, if indeed those eleven laborers in Picardy, who came in for such an unexpected windfall, could regard themselves as despoiled.

But on the eve of the auction, at the moment when all concerned thought themselves secure of doubling their fortunes at a stroke, there came down a solicitor from Paris, who went to a solicitor at Ville-aux-Fayes (an old clerk of his, as it turned out), and the former empowered the latter to buy the Aigues, which he accordingly did, for eleven hundred and fifty thousand francs. Gaubertin was convinced that Soudry was at the bottom of this, and Lupin and Soudry were equally sure that Gaubertin had outwitted them both; but when the purchaser's name was declared, a reconciliation took place.

The country solicitor had his own suspicions of the plans formed by Gaubertin, Lupin, and Soudry, but he was very careful not to enlighten his sometime employer, and for the following excellent reason: Unless the new-comer kept his own counsel, the ministerial official would have the country made too hot to hold him. The wisdom of his taciturnity was, moreover, amply justified by the subsequent course of events to be related in this Study. If the provincial is crafty, it is in self-defense; his excuse lies in the danger of a position admirably depicted by the popular adage, "One must howl with the wolves," a doctrine which finds its concrete expression in the character of Philinte.

So when General de Montcornet took possession of the

Aigues, Gaubertin was not rich enough to resign his post. If his eldest daughter was to marry the rich banker of the Entrepôt, her portion of two hundred thousand francs must be forthcoming; then there was his son's practice, which would cost thirty thousand francs; and out of the three hundred and seventy thousand which still remained to him, he must sooner or later find a dowry for his youngest girl Elise, whom, he hoped, would make a match as brilliant as that of her elder sister. The steward determined to study Montcornet's character, possibly he might contrive to disgust the general with the place, and to reap the benefit of his abortive schemes.

With the peculiar shrewdness of those who have made their way by cunning, Gaubertin put faith in a not ill-grounded belief in a general resemblance between the character of an old soldier and an aged actress. An opera girl, and one of Napoleon's old generals—what could you expect of either but the same thriftlessness, the same careless ways? To the adventuress and to the soldier fortune comes capriciously and through peril. There may be astute, shrewd, and politic military men, but they surely are not the ordinary stamp. The typical soldier is supposed to be simple and unsuspecting, a child in matters of business, and but little fitted to cope with the thousand and one details of the management of a great estate, and this more particularly in the case of such a fire-eater as Montcornet. Gaubertin flattered himself that he could take and hold the general in the net in which Mlle. Laguerre had ended her days. But it so happened that, in the time of the Emperor, Montcornet had himself been in very much such a position in Pomerania as Gaubertin held at the Aigues, and the general had had practical experience of the opportunities of a stewardship.

When the old Cuirassier took to "planting cabbages," to use the expression of the first Duc de Baron, he wanted some occupation to divert his mind from his fall. Although he had carried his corps over to the Bourbons, his share of a

service performed by several generals, and christened the "Disbanding of the Army of the Loire," could not redeem his blunder of the following year, when Montcornet had followed the Man of the Hundred Days to his last field of battle at Waterloo. During the occupation of the Allies it was impossible for the peer of 1815 to remain on the muster-roll of the army, and still more impossible to retain his seat at the Luxembourg. So Montcornet acted on the advice of the old marshal in disgrace, and went to cultivate carrots in sober earnest. The general was not wanting in the shrewdness of an old war-wolf. During the very first days spent in investigating his possessions, he soon found out the sort of man that he had to do with in Gaubertin; for the typical steward under the old noblesse was a variety of rogue familiar to almost all of Napoleon's mushroom nobility of dukes and marshals sprung from beds of straw.

The shrewd old Cuirassier likewise saw how useful Gaubertin's profound experience of agricultural administration and the manners and customs of misdemeanants would be to him; so he appeared to be a continuation of Mlle. Laguerre, with an assumption of carelessness which deceived the steward. The period of ineptitude lasted until the general had time to find out the strong and weak points of the Aigues, the ins and outs of the receipts, the manner in which the rents were collected, the necessary improvements and economies, and the ways in which he was robbed.

Then one fine day, catching Gaubertin with his hand in the bag (to use the time-honored expression), the general took occasion to fly into one of the fearful passions to which the conquering hero is peculiarly subject. Therein he committed a capital error. It was one of those blunders which would have shaken the future of a man who had not his great wealth or firmness of purpose, and there, in fact, was the origin of the whole tissue of disasters, great and small, with which this story teems. Montcornet had been trained in the Imperial

school, he slashed his way through difficulties, and deep was his scorn of civilians. Montcornet could not see that there was any need to mince matters when a rascally steward was to be sent about his business. The general knew nothing of civil life and its countless precautions, his temper was not improved by his disgrace, so he inflicted a deep mortification on Gaubertin, who, moreover, drew it upon himself by a cynical retort that infuriated the general.

"So you are living on my land?" the count had remarked with grim hilarity.

"Did you suppose that I could live on what falls from heaven?" Gaubertin retorted with a grin.

"Get out of this, you scamp, or I'll make you!" roared the general, accompanying the words with several cuts of a horsewhip, though the steward always denied a thrashing that no one witnessed.

"I shall not go until I have my discharge," Gaubertin exclaimed coolly, as soon as he had put a distance between himself and the truculent Cuirassier.

"We shall see what they think of you in a court of law," returned Montcornet, with a shrug.

At the threat of prosecution, Gaubertin looked the count in the face and smiled; it was a smile of peculiar efficacy, for the general's arm dropped to his side as if the sinews had been cut. Let us go into the explanation of that smile.

Two years ago Gaubertin's brother-in-law Gendrin had been appointed to the presidency of the Court of First Instance, where he had long been a judge. He owed the appointment to the Comte de Soulanges, who had been made a peer of France in 1814, and had kept stanch to the Bourbons during the Hundred Days. M. de Soulanges had asked the keeper of the seals to nominate Gendrin. Such kinship as this gave Gaubertin a certain importance in the country. A president of a court of first instance in a small town is, relatively speaking, a much greater person than the president

of a court-royal in a city where there are rival luminaries in the shape of the commander, the bishop, prefect, and receiver-general; a simple president of a court of first instance shines alone, for neither the public prosecutor nor the sub-prefect is a permanent official. Young Soudry and Gaubertin's son had been friends as lads at the Aigues, and afterward in Paris, and now young Soudry had just received the appointment of public-prosecutor's substitute in the chief town of the department.

Soudry senior, once a quartermaster in an artillery regiment, had been wounded in an action in defense of M. de Soulanges, then adjutant-general. Since those days the gendarmerie had been established, and M. de Soulanges (now a colonel) asked for a police-sergeant's post for the man who had saved his life, and, at a later time, obtained a post for Soudry's son. And finally, when Mlle. Gaubertin's marriage had been definitely arranged at the Quai de Béthune, the unjust steward felt that he had a stronger position in the district than an unattached lieutenant-general.

If this story were nothing but a chronicle of the rupture between the general and his steward, it would even then be well worth serious attention, as a guide to the conduct of life. Those who can profit by the perusal of Machiavelli's treatise will find it demonstrated therein that, in dealing with human nature, it is a prudent course to refrain from menaces, to proceed to act without talking about it, to leave a way of escape open to a defeated enemy, to be very careful, as the saying is, not to tread on a serpent's tail, and to avoid, like murder, any mortification to an inferior. A deed, once done, is forgiven sooner or later, injurious though it may have been to other people's interests (a fact which may be explained in ways too numerous to mention), but a wound dealt to self-love is never stanched, and never pardoned. Our mental susceptibilities are keener and, in a sense, more vital than our physical susceptibilities, and the heart and arteries are less sensitive than

the nerves. In everything that we do, in fact, it is this inmost *ego* who rules us. Civil war will quench an ancestral blood-feud, as has been seen in the history of Breton and Vendean families; but between the spoiler and the spoiled, the slanderer and his victim, no reconciliation is possible. People should refrain from insulting each other, except in epic poems, before a general and final slaughter.

The savage and his near relation, the peasant, never make use of articulate speech, except to lay traps for their enemies. Ever since 1789 France has been trying to persuade mankind, against all evidence to the contrary, that all men are equal; you may tell a man that he is a rascal, and it passes for a harmless joke; but once proceed to bring it home to him by detecting him in the act, and enforcing your conclusion by a horsewhip, once threaten him with prosecution and fail to execute your threat, and you set up the old conditions of inequality again. And if the people cannot suffer any superiority, how should any rogue, however successful, forgive an honest man?

Montcornet should have parted with his steward on some pretext of old obligations to fulfill, some old soldier to put in his place; and both Gaubertin and the general would have known the real reason perfectly well. If the latter had been more careful of the former's self-love, he would have left an open door for the man's retreat, and Gaubertin would have left the great landowner in peace; he would have forgotten his defeat at the auction, and very likely would have looked for an investment for his capital in Paris. But now that he was ignominiously driven from his post, he nursed a rancorous hatred of his employer, one of those hatreds which are an element of provincial life; so lasting and so pertinacious are they, that their intricate meshes amaze diplomatists, whose cue it is to be astonished at nothing. A burning thirst for vengeance counseled retirement to Ville-aux-Fayes; there he would put himself in a position which gave

him power to annoy Montcornet, and raise up enemies in sufficient force to compel him to sell the Aigues.

Everything combined to deceive the general. Nothing in Gaubertin's appearance was calculated to warn or alarm him. The steward had always made it a rule to pose not exactly as a poor man, but as a man who found it difficult to make both ends meet—a tradition which was handed down by his predecessor. Therefore for the last twelve years he put his wife and three children forward on all occasions, and talked about the heavy expenses of so large a family. It was Mlle. Laguerre who paid for his son's education in Paris; Gaubertin told her that he himself was too poor to afford the expense; and she, Claude Gaubertin's godmother, had allowed her dear godson a hundred louis per annum.

The next day Gaubertin appeared accompanied by one of the keepers, Courtecuisse by name, and held his head high, and asked for his discharge. He laid before the general the discharges given him by the late Mlle. Laguerre, all couched in flattering terms, and begged, with ironical humility, that the general would discover and point out any instances of misappropriation on his (Gaubertin's) part. If he received a bonus from the timber merchants and farmers on the renewal of contracts or leases, Mlle. Laguerre had always authorized it (he said), and she had actually been a gainer by so doing; and not only so, by these means she had lived in peace. Any one in the countryside would have died for mademoiselle; but if the general went on in this way, he was laying up trouble in plenty for himself.

Gaubertin believed—and this last trait is very common in most professions where men exercise their wits to take their neighbor's goods in ways unprovided for by the Code—Gaubertin believed that he was a perfectly honest man. In the first place, there was the old affair of the coin wrung from the tenants during the Terror; it was now so long since he re-

mitted the rents to Mlle. Laguerre in assignats and pocketed the difference, that he had come to regard the money as lawfully acquired gain. It was simply a matter of exchange. Before he had done, he began to think that he had even run some risk in taking silver crowns, and beside, *legally*, mademoiselle had no right to anything but assignats. *Legally* is a robust adverb; it carries the weight of many ill-gotten gains! Finally, ever since great landowners and stewards have existed, which is to say, ever since the first beginnings of civilization, the steward has fabricated for his personal use a chain of reasoning that finds favor with cookmaids at the present day, and which may be concisely stated as follows:

"If my mistress went to market herself" (so the handmaid privately argues), "she would perhaps buy dearer than I do; so she is a gainer, and the profit that I make had better go into my pocket than to the storekeepers."

"If Mademoiselle Laguerre were to manage the Aigues for herself, she would not make thirty thousand francs out of it; the peasants, and timber merchants, and laborers would rob her of the difference; it is more natural that I should keep it; and I spare her a deal of trouble," said Gaubertin to himself.

No influence save the Catholic religion has power to prevent such capitulation of conscience; but since 1789 religion in France has lost its hold on two-thirds of the population. Poverty induces uniformity, and in the valley of the Aigues, where the peasants were mentally very wide awake, they had sunk to a frightful degree of moral degradation. They certainly went to mass of a Sunday, but they stopped outside the church, and had fallen into a habit of meeting there regularly to conclude bargains and discuss business.

The reader should by this time have an idea of the extent of the mischief done by the easy-going ways of the first pupil of the Royal Academy of Music. Mlle. Laguerre's selfishness had injured the cause of those who have, always an object of hatred to those who have not. Since 1792 all the landowners

of France must show a compact front, and stand or fall together. Alas! if the families of feudal nobles, less numerous than bourgeois families, could not understand the unity of their interests in 1400 in the time of Louis XI., nor yet again in 1600 under Richelieu, how should the bourgeoisie of this nineteenth century (in spite of its boasted progress) be more united than the old noblesse? An oligarchy of a hundred thousand rich men has all the drawbacks of a democracy with none of its advantages. *Each for himself. Let each man mind his own business!* Family selfishness is stronger than the class selfishness so much needed by society in these days, that oligarchical selfishness of which England has exhibited such a striking example for the past three hundred years. No matter what is done, the landowners will never see any necessity for a discipline through which the church has come to be such an admirable model of government, until the moment when the threatened danger comes home to them, and then it will be too late. Communism, that living force and practical logic of democracy, is already attacking society in the domain of theory, whence it is evident that the proletarian Samson, grown prudent, will henceforth sap the pillars of society in the cellar, instead of shaking them in the banquet-hall.

VII.

OF EXTINCT SOCIAL SPECIES.

The Aigues must have a steward, for the general had no idea of giving up the pleasures of the winter season in Paris, where he had a splendid mansion in the Rue Neuve-des-Mathurins. So he looked out for a successor to Gaubertin; but, in truth, he was at less pains to find a steward than Gaubertin to put a man of his own choosing into the place.

Of all responsible posts, there is not one which demands greater experience and more activity than the stewardship of

a great estate. The difficulty of finding the man is only appreciated by great landowners, and becomes acute only at a distance of, say, forty leagues from the capital. That is the limit of the area which supplies the Paris markets, the limit also of steady rents and of long leases, and of tenants with capital in competition for them. Tenants of this class come into town in cabriolets and pay their rent with cheques, if indeed their salesman at the Great Market does not make their payments for them. There is such brisk competition for farms in the departments of Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne, Oise, Eure-et-Loire, Seine-Inférieure, and Loiret, that capital does not always return one and a half per cent. Even compared with the returns of land in Holland, Belgium, and England, this produce is enormous; but beyond a limit of fifty leagues from Paris, a large estate means so many different forms of cultivation, so many and such different crops, that farming becomes an industry, with a manufacturer's risks. A great landowner under these circumstances is nothing but a merchant, who must find a market for his produce like any iron-master or cotton-spinner. Nor is he without competitors; the peasants and the small proprietors cut down his profits remorselessly by descending to transactions in which no gentleman will engage.

A steward should know the system of land measurement, the customs of the countryside, the methods of sale and exploitations, and must be able to sail pretty near the wind in his employer's interest. He must understand book-keeping; and, beside enjoying the best of health, must have a decided taste for equitation and an active life. He is the master's representative, and always in communication with him, and cannot be a man of the people. And as few stewards' salaries exceed a thousand crowns per annum, the problem of discovering the model steward would appear to be insoluble. How should a man combining so many precious qualities be found at such a moderate price, where any employment is open to

him in this country? Send for a man who does not know the district, and you shall pay dear for the experience he acquires. Train up a youth who belongs to the neighborhood, and in all likelihood you cocker ingratitude. So you are left to choose between honest ineptitude, so slow or so short-sighted as to injure your interests, and self-seeking cleverness. Wherefore the classification and natural history of stewards was thus summed up by a great Polish landowner, "There are two varieties here," said he; "the first kind of steward thinks of no one but himself; the second thinks of us as well as of himself; happy the landowner who can put his hand on the second! As for the steward who only thinks of your interests, he has never been seen here up to the present time!"

An example of a steward who bears his employer's interests in mind, as well as his own, has been given elsewhere;* Gaubertin is the steward who thinks of nothing but his own fortune; as for the third term of the problem, any representation of him would probably be regarded as a fancy portrait; he was known to the old noblesse, but the type vanished with them.† The continual subdivision of fortunes inevitably brings about a change in the way of life of the aristocracy. If there are not at present twenty fortunes administered by a steward, in fifty years' time there will not be a hundred great estates left for stewards to administer, unless some change is made meanwhile in the law. Every rich landowner will be obliged to look closely to his own interests himself. This process of transformation, even now begun, suggested the remark made by a witty old lady, who was asked why she had spent the summer in Paris since 1830: "Since the castles became farmhouses I have ceased to visit them," she said.

But what will be the end of a dispute which waxes hotter and hotter between man and man, between rich and poor? This Study has been undertaken to throw light upon this terrible social question, and for no other reason.

* See "Un Début dans la Vie." † "Le Cabinet des Antiques."

The general had dismissed Gaubertin, and the general's awkward predicament may be imagined. While saying vaguely to himself, like all persons who are free to act or not, "I will get rid of that rogue," he had not reckoned with fate, nor with his own furious outbursts of anger, the anger of a choleric fire-eater, ready to break out as soon as some flagrant misdeed should force him to raise the eyelids which he deliberately closed.

Montcornet, a Parisian born and bred, was a landowner for the first time in his life, and his preliminary studies of the country had convinced him that some intermediary between a man in his position and so many peasants was absolutely necessary; but he had omitted to provide himself beforehand with a steward.

Gaubertin in the course of an exchange of courtesies, which lasted for a couple of hours, discovered the general's predicament; so, on leaving the house, the ex-steward bestrode his cob, and galloped off to take counsel with Soudry at Soulanges.

No sooner had he said, "The general and I have parted company; how can we fit him with a steward of our own choosing?" than the Soudrys saw what their friend had in mind. It must not be forgotten that Police-sergeant Soudry had been in office in the canton for seventeen years, and that to back him he had a wife endowed with the cunning peculiar to an opera-singer's waiting-maid.

"He will go a long way before he will find any one as good as poor Sibilet," said Mme. Soudry.

"His goose is cooked!" cried Gaubertin, still red with the humiliations he had been through.

"Lupin," he went on, turning to the notary who was present, "just go down to Ville-aux-Fayes and prime Maréchal, in case our fine Cuirassier goes to ask him for information."

M. Maréchal was the local attorney who had bought the

Aigues, and had naturally been recommended to Montcornet by his own family attorney in Paris after the happy conclusion of the bargain.

The Sibilet to whom they alluded, the oldest son of the clerk of the court at Ville-aux-Fayes, was a notary's clerk without a penny to bless himself with. He had fallen madly in love at the age of twenty-five with the daughter of the justice of the peace at Soulanges.

That worthy magistrate, Sarcus by name, having a stipend of fifteen hundred francs, had married a penniless girl, the oldest sister of the Soulanges apothecary, M. Vermut. Mlle. Sarcus was an only daughter, but her beauty was all her dowry, and she could not be said to live on the salary of a country notary's clerk. Young Sibilet was related to Gaubertin (his precise degree of relationship would have been rather difficult to trace among the family ramifications of a small town where all the middle-class people were cousins); but, thanks to his father and to Gaubertin, he had a modest place in the Land Registration Department. To this luckless young man's lot fell the alarming blessing of two children in three years' time. His own father had a family of five, and could do nothing to help his son; his father-in-law, the justice of the peace, had nothing but his house in Soulanges and a thousand crowns of income, so Mme. Sibilet the younger and her two children lived for the most part under her father's roof; and Adolphe Sibilet, whose duties took him all over the department, only saw his Adeline at intervals, an arrangement which, perhaps, explains the fruitfulness of some marriages.

Gaubertin's exclamation will be easily understood by the light of this summary of Sibilet's history, but a few explanatory details must be added. Adolphe Sibilet, surpassingly ill-favored, as has been seen in a preceding sketch, belonged to that class of men whose only way to a woman's heart lies through the mayor's office and the church. With something

of the suppleness of a steel spring, he would relinquish his idea to seize on it again at a later day, a shifty disposition of mind closely resembling baseness; but in the course of an apprenticeship served in a country notary's office, Sibilet had learned to hide this defect beneath a gruff manner, which simulated a strength which he did not possess. Plenty of hollow natures mask their emptiness in this way; deal their own measure to them, and you shall see them collapse like a balloon at a pin-prick. This was the clerk's son. But as men, for the most part, are not observers, and as among observers three-fourths observe after the fact, Adolphe Sibilet's grumbling manner was taken for the result of an honest outspoken nature, a capacity much praised by his employer, and an upright integrity, which had never been put to the proof. Sometimes a man's defects are as useful to him as better qualities to his neighbor.

Adeline Sarcus, a nice-looking young woman, had been brought up by a mother (who died three years before her marriage) as carefully as only daughters can be educated in a little out-of-the-way place. Adeline was in love with the handsome Lupin, only son of the Soulanges notary. But her romance was still in its early chapters when Lupin senior (who intended his son to marry Mlle. Elise Gaubertin) sent young Amaury Lupin to Paris into the office of Maître Crottat, notary; and, under the pretense of studying the art of conveyancing and drawing up contracts, Amaury led a wild life, and got into debt under the auspices of another clerk in the same office, one George Marest, a wealthy young fellow, who initiated Lupin into the mysteries of Parisian life. By the time that Maître Lupin came to fetch his son home again, Adeline had changed her name, and was Mme. Sibilet. In fact, when the amorous Adolphe presented himself, Sarcus, the old justice of the peace, acting on a hint from Lupin senior, hastened on a marriage, to which Adeline resigned herself in despair.

An assessor's place is not a career. Like many other depart-

ments which offer no prospects, it is a sort of hole in the administrative colander. The men who start in life through one of these holes (say in the Ordnance Survey, Department of Roads and Bridges, or the teaching profession) always discover a little late that cleverer men than themselves, seated beside them, are "kept moist by the sweat of the people" (in the language of Opposition writers) every time that the colander is dipped into the taxes by means of the machinery called the Budget. Adolphe, working early and late, and earning little, very soon discovered the bottomless barrenness of his hole; so as he trotted from commune to commune, spending his salary on traveling expenses and shoe leather, his thoughts were busy with schemes for finding a permanent and profitable situation.

No one can imagine, unless indeed he happens to squint and to have two children born in lawful wedlock, how three years of struggle and love had developed ambition in this young fellow, who had a mental squint resembling his physical infirmity, and whose happiness halted, as it were. Perhaps an incomplete happiness is the chief cause of most scoundrelly actions and untold baseness committed in secret; it may be that we can more easily endure hopeless misery than steady rain, with brief glimpse of sunshine and love. Just as the body contracts diseases, the soul contracts the canker of envy. In little natures envy becomes a base and brutal covetousness, shrinking from sight, but from nothing else; in cultivated minds it fosters subversive doctrines, which a man uses as a stepping-stone to raise himself above his superiors. Might not the situation be summed up in an aphorism, "Tell me what you have, and I will tell you your opinions?"

Adolphe was fond of his wife, but he constantly said to himself, "I have made a mistake; I have three sets of shackles, and only one pair of legs; I ought to have made my way before I married. I might have found an Adeline any day; but now Adeline stands in my way."

Adolphe had gone to see his relative Gaubertin three times in as many years. A few words that he let fall told Gaubertin that here in his relative's soul was the mud which hardens under the fiery heat of the temptation of legalized robbery. Warily he probed this nature, which seemed plastic to his purpose, provided it were worth while to yield. Adolphe Sibilet grumbled on each occasion.

"Just find me something to do, cousin," he said. "Take me on as your clerk, and make me your successor. I would remove mountains to give my Adeline, I will not say luxury, but a modest competence. You made Monsieur Leclercq's fortune; why should you not start me in the banking line in Paris?"

"We will see. Some day I will find a place for you," his ambitious relative would reply. "Meantime, make acquaintances, everything helps."

In this frame of mind a letter from Mme. Soudry, bidding him "come at once," brought Adolphe in hot haste to Soulanges through a region of castles in the air.

The Soudrys explained to Sarcus that on him devolved the duty of calling on the general on the morrow to put in a word for his son-in-law, and suggest Adolphe for the vacant position. Acting on the advice of Mme. Soudry, the local oracle, the old man had taken his daughter with him, and the sight of her had disposed Montcornet in their favor.

"I shall not decide until I have made inquiries," the general said, "but I will not look out for any one else until I have seen whether or not your son-in-law is in all respects the man for the place. The desire of settling so charming a young lady at the Aigues——"

"The mother of two children, general," said Adeline adroitly, to turn off the old soldier's compliments.

All the general's inquiries were cleverly anticipated by the Soudrys, with Gaubertin and Lupin, who skillfully obtained for their candidate the influence of the leading men in the

principal town of the canton — Councilor Gendrin of the Court-Royal (a distant relation of the president at Ville-aux-Fayes); Baron Bourlac, attorney-general and young Soudry's chief; and Sarcus, councilor of the prefecture, third cousin to Adeline's father. Everybody, from the general's attorney to the prefect (to whom the general went in person), had a good word for the underpaid official, "so interesting" he was said to be. Sibilet's marriage made him as irreproachable as one of Miss Edgeworth's novels, and marked him out as a man above mercenary motives.

The time which the steward spent perforce at the Aigues was turned to profit. He did all that in him lay to make trouble and annoyance for his old employer, but a single little scene will give a sufficient idea of the rest. The day after his dismissal he made an opportunity of finding Courtecuisse, the one forester employed under his rule at the Aigues, which really required three at the least.

"Well, Monsieur Gaubertin," remarked the other, "so you have had words with the master, have you?"

"You know that already!" exclaimed Gaubertin. "Well, yes. The general takes it upon himself to order us about like his Cuirassiers; he does not know us Burgundians. Monsieur le Comte was not satisfied with my services, and, as I was not satisfied with his ways, we dismissed each other; we almost came to blows over it, for he is a perfect tempest. Look out for yourself, Courtecuisse! Ah! old boy, I once thought to have given you a better master——"

"I know you did," said the keeper, "and I would have served you well. Lord! after knowing each other these twenty years. You took me on here in poor dear sainted madame's time! Ah! a kind woman she was; they don't make such as her now! The place has lost a mother in her."

"I say, Courtecuisse, if you are willing, you can do us a fine good turn."

"Then are you going to stop in the place? We heard you were going to Paris."

"No. I shall find something to do at Ville-aux-Fayes, and see how things turn out. The general does not know the people he is dealing with; he will be hated, do you see? I must wait and see if anything turns up. Go softly about your business here; he will tell you to carry things with a high hand, for he can see well enough where the waste goes on. But do not you be so thick-headed as to lay yourself open to a drubbing, and maybe worse than a drubbing, from the people round about for the sake of his timber."

"Dear Monsieur Gaubertin, he will turn me away, and you know how very well off I am at the Avonne gate."

"The general will be sick of his property before long," said Gaubertin; "it will not be long before you come back if he does turn you off. And, beside, do you see these woods here?" he added, waving his hand toward the landscape, "I am stronger there than the masters."

They were talking out in a field.

"These *Arminacs* from Paris ought to keep to their gutters in Paris," said the keeper.

That word *Arminacs* has come down from the fifteenth century, when the Armagnacs, the Parisians, were hostile to the Duke of Burgundy. It is a word of abuse to-day on the outskirts of Upper Burgundy, where it is mispronounced in various ways in different districts.

"He shall go back, but not before he has had a thrashing!" said Gaubertin. "Some of these days we will turn the park at the Aigues into ploughed land, for it is robbing the people to keep nine hundred acres of the best land in the valley for the pleasure of an upstart."

"Lord! that would keep four hundred families!" put in Courtecuisse.

"Well, if you want two acres for yourself out of it, you must help us to make an outlaw of that cur——"

While Gaubertin was fulminating his sentence of excommunication, the worthy justice of the peace was introducing his son-in-law, Adolphe Sibilet, to the general. Adeline had come with the two children in the basket-chaise borrowed of Sarcus' registrar, a M. Gourdon, brother of the Soulanges doctor, and a richer man than the justice. This kind of thing, which suits but ill with the dignity of the magistrate's office, is to be seen everywhere; every justice's clerk is richer than the justice himself; every clerk of a court of first instance is better paid than the president; whereas it would seem only natural to pay the subordinate, not by fees, but by a fixed salary, and so to cut down the expenses of litigation.

The general was well pleased with the worthy functionary's character and straightforwardness, and with Adeline's charming appearance; and, in fact, these two made their promises in all good faith, for neither father nor daughter knew of the diplomatic part cut out for Sibilet by Gaubertin; so M. de Montcornet at once made to the young and interesting couple proposals which would make the position of steward of the manor equal to that of a sub-prefect of the first class.

A lodge built by Bouret, partly as a feature of the landscape, partly as a house for the steward, was assigned to the Sibilets. It was a picturesque building in the same style as the Blangy gate, which has been sufficiently described already; Gaubertin had previously lived there. The general showed no intention of putting down the riding-horse which Mlle. Laguerre had allowed Gaubertin for his own use, on account of the size of the estate, and the distance he was obliged to go to markets and on other necessary business. The new steward was allowed a hundred bushels of wheat, three hogsheads of wine, as much firewood as he required, oats and barley in abundance, and three per cent. upon the receipts. If Mlle. Laguerre had drawn more than forty thousand livres of income from the estate in 1800, the general thought, and with good reason, that after all her numerous and important purchases it should

bring in sixty thousand in 1818. The new steward, therefore, might look to make nearly two thousand francs in money some day. He would live rent free and tax free, with no expenses for food, or fuel, or horse, or poultry-yard; and, beside all this, the count allowed him a kitchen garden, and promised not to consider a day's work done in it by the gardener now and again. Such advantages were certainly worth a good two thousand francs. The stewardship of the Aigues after the assessorship was a transition from penury to wealth.

"If you devote yourself to my interests," said the general, "I may do more for you. For one thing, I shall have it in my power to appoint you to collect the taxes in Conches, Blangy, and Cerneux, separating those three places from the Soulanges division. In short, as soon as you bring the net receipts up to sixty thousand francs, you shall have your reward."

Unluckily, the worthy Sarcus and Adeline, in the joy of their hearts, were so imprudent as to tell Mme. Soudry about the count's promise. They forgot that the receiver at Soulanges was one Guerbert, brother of the postmaster at Conches, and a connection, as will be seen later, of the Gendrins and Gaubertins.

"It will not be easy to do, my child," said Mme. Soudry, "but do not hinder the count from setting about it; no one knows how easily the hardest things are done in Paris. I have seen the Chevalier Gluck down on his knees to madame that's gone, and she sang his part for him—she that would have cut herself in pieces for Piccini, and Piccini was one of the most agreeable men of those days. He never came to madame's house, dear gentleman, but he would put his arm round my waist and call me his 'pretty rogue.'"

"Oh, indeed!" cried the sergeant, when his wife retailed this piece of news, "so he thinks that he will do as he likes with the place, turn things upside down, and order people about right and left as if they were men in his regiment.

These officers have domineering ways! But wait awhile, we have Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Ronquerolles on our side. Poor old Guerbet, how little he suspects that they mean to pluck the finest roses off his tree."

The lady's-maid had this piece of Dorat phraseology from Mlle. Laguerre, who learned it of Bouret, who had it from some editor of the "Mercury." And now Soudry used it so often that it became a current saying at Soulanges.

Now "old Guerbet," receiver of taxes at Soulanges, was a local wit, the stock comic character of the little town, and one of the notables of Mme. Soudry's set. The sergeant's outburst exactly expressed the general feeling toward the master of the Aigues. From Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes the whole district had been poisoned against him by Gaubertin's efforts.

Sibilet's installation took place toward the end of the autumn of 1817. The year 1818 came and went, and the general never set foot on the estate. He was occupied by his own approaching marriage, which took place early in 1819, and he spent most of the summer in paying court to his betrothed in his future father-in-law's castle near Alençon. Beside the Aigues and his splendid townhouse, General de Montcornet possessed an income of sixty thousand francs in the Funds, and drew the pay of a lieutenant-general on the reserve. Yet, although Napoleon had made the brilliant soldier a count of the Empire, granting him for arms *a shield bearing four coats quarterly: the first, azure, on a desert or three pyramids argent; the second, sinople, three bugles argent; the third, gules, a cannon or, mounted on a gun-carriage sable, in chief a crescent of the second; the fourth, or a crown sinople,* with the mediæval sounding motto, *Sonnez la charge,* Montcornet was conscious that his father had been a cabinet-maker in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, a fact which he was perfectly willing to forget. Wherefore, consumed with a desire to be a peer of France, he counted as naught his grand cordon of the Legion of Honor, his cross of Saint-Louis, and a hundred and forty

thousand francs of income. The demon of titles had bitten him, the sight of a blue ribbon drove him distracted, and the heroic fighter on Essling field would have lapped all the mud on the Pont Royal to gain an entrance into the set of the Navarreins, Lenoncourts, Maufrigneuses, d'Espards, and Vandenesses, the families of Grandlieu, Verneuil, d'Hérouville, Chaulieu, and so forth.

In the year 1818, when it became plain to him that there was no hope of a return of the Bonapartes, Montcornet availed himself of the friendly offices of his friends' wives. Those ladies advertised in the Faubourg Saint-Germain that the general was ready to give heart and hand and fortune and a house in town as the price of an alliance with any great family whatsoever.

It was the Duchesse de Carigliano who succeeded after untold efforts in finding a suitable match in one of the three branches of the Troisville family, to wit, that of the viscount who had been in the Russian service since 1789, and came back with the emigrants in 1815. The viscount had only a younger brother's share when he married a Princesse Scherbellof with near a million to her fortune; but his estate had been burdened since by two sons and three daughters. His ancient and powerful family numbered among its members a peer of France, the Marquis de Troisville, head of the oldest branch; as well as two deputies, each with a numerous progeny all busy in getting their share out of the taxes, hangers-on attached to the ministry and the court, like goldfishes about a crust. So, as soon as Montcornet was introduced into this family by one of the most zealous Bourbon partisans among Napoleon's duchesses, he was well received. Montcornet asked, in return for his money and a blind affection for his wife, for a post in the Royal Guards, a marquis' patent, and to be in time a peer of France; but all that the Troisvilles promised him was the influence and support of their three branches.

"You know what that means," said the maréchale to her old friend, complaining that the promise was rather vague. "No one can answer for the King; we can only prompt the royal will."

Montcornet made Virginie de Troisville his residuary legatee in the marriage-contract. Completely subjugated by his wife, as explained in Blondet's letter, he was still without other heirs, but he had been presented at the court of Louis XVIII., and his majesty had conferred the ribbon of Saint-Louis upon the old Bonapartist, and allowed him to quarter his preposterous escutcheon with the arms of Troisville; the marquisate and peerage were promised as rewards to future devotion.

But, a few days after the audience, the Duc de Berri was murdered, the Pavillon Marsan carried all before it, Villèle came into power, and all the Troisvilles' threads of diplomacy were broken off; new points of attachment must be found for them among the ministry.

"We must wait," said the Troisvilles, and Montcornet, overwhelmed as he was with civilities in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, waited. This was how the general came to stay away from the Aigues in 1818.

In his happiness (ineffable bliss for the storekeeper's son from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine) with this young wife, highly bred, lively, and sweet-natured, he must shower all the delights of Paris upon the daughter of the Troisvilles, who had opened all doors in the Faubourg Saint-Germain to him; and these divers joys so completely effaced the unpleasant scene with the steward from his mind that Gaubertin and his doings and his very name were quite forgotten.

In 1820 the general brought the countess into the country to show her the Aigues, and passed Sibilet's accounts and ratified his actions without looking too closely into them. Happiness is no haggler. The countess was delighted to find the steward's wife such a charming woman, and made presents

to her and to the children, with whom she played for a little while. She also commanded some alterations in the house, and an architect was summoned from Paris; for she proposed (and the general was wild with joy at the thought) to spend six months out of the twelve in such a splendid abode. All the general's savings were spent on carrying out the architect's scheme and on the dainty furniture from Paris; and the Aigues received that final touch which stamped it as unique—a monument to the tastes of four different centuries.

In 1821 the general was almost summoned by Sibilet before the month of May. Weighty matters were at stake. The nine years' lease of the woods to a timber merchant, concluded by Gaubertin in 1812 at thirty thousand francs, expired on May 15th of that year. So, at first, Sibilet would not meddle in the matter of renewing the lease; he was jealous of his reputation for honesty. "You know, M. le Comte," he wrote, "that I have no finger in that pie." But the timber merchant wanted the indemnity which he had shared with Gaubertin, an exaction to which Mlle. Laguerre had submitted in her dislike of lawsuits. The excuse for the indemnity was based on the depredations of the peasantry, who behaved as if they had an established right to cut wood for fuel in the forest. Messrs. Gravelot Brothers, the timber merchants in Paris, declined to pay for the last quarter, and offered to bring experts to prove that the woods had fallen off one-fifth in their annual value; they argued from the bad precedent established by Mlle. Laguerre.

"I have already summoned these gentlemen to appear in the Court at Ville-aux-Fayes," so Sibilet's letter ran, "for, on account of this lease, they have appointed their domicile with my old employer, Maître Corbinet. I am afraid we shall lose the day."

"Here is a matter in which our income is involved, fair lady," said the general, showing the letter to his wife; "do you mind going sooner than last year to the Aigues?"

"Do you go, and I will come down as soon as the summer begins," said the countess, rather pleased with the prospect of staying behind in Paris by herself.

So the general set out alone. He was fully determined to take strong measures, for he knew the treacherous disease which was eating into the best of his revenues; but, as remains to be seen, the general reckoned without his Gaubertin.

VIII.

THE GREAT REVOLUTIONS OF A LITTLE VALLEY.

"Well, now, Lawyer Sibilet," began the general on the morning after his arrival, addressing his steward by a familiar nickname, which showed how much he appreciated the legal knowledge of the quondam notary's clerk. "Well, Lawyer Sibilet, and so, in Ministerial language, we are 'passing through a crisis,' are we?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," replied Sibilet, following in the general's wake.

The happy proprietor of the Aigues was walking up and down before his steward's house, in a space where Mme. Sibilet's flowers were growing on the edge of the wide stretch of grass watered by the broad channel spoken of in Blondet's letter. The Aigues itself lay in full view of the garden, even as from the castle you saw the steward's house, which had been built for the sake of its effect in the landscape.

"But where is the difficulty?" pursued the general. "I shall go through with the Gravelots' case; a wound in the purse is not mortal. And I will have the contract well advertised; we shall soon find out the real value of the lease by comparing the bids of the competitors."

"Things will not go off that way, Monsieur le Comte," Sibilet answered. "If you have no offers, what will you do then?"

"Fell my timber, and sell it myself."

"*You* turn timber merchant!" cried Sibilet, and saw that the general shrugged his shoulders. "I am quite willing. Let us say no more about your affairs here. Let us look at Paris. You would have to take a timber-yard on lease there, take out a license, pay taxes, pay lighterage, city dues, wharfingers and workmen; in short, you must have a responsible agent——"

"Quite out of the question!" the general hastily broke in in alarm. "But why should I have no bidders?"

"Monsieur le Comte, you have enemies in the place."

"And who are they?"

"Monsieur Gaubertin, first and foremost——"

"Oh! Is that the scamp who was here before your time?"

"Not so loud, Monsieur le Comte!" entreated Sibilet in terror; "for pity's sake, do not speak so loud! My servant-girl may overhear——"

"What!" returned the general, "cannot I talk on my own property of a scoundrel who robbed me?"

"If you value a quiet life, Monsieur le Comte, come further away! Now; Gaubertin is mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Ha! I wish Ville-aux-Fayes joy of him with all my heart. Thunder of heaven! He is a nice mayor for a place!——"

"Do me the honor of listening to me, Monsieur le Comte, and, believe me, we have a most serious matter in hand, the question of your future here."

"I am listening. Let us sit down on this bench."

"When you dismissed Gaubertin, Monsieur le Comte, he had to do something, for he was not rich——"

"Not rich! and he was helping himself here to twenty thousand francs a year!"

"Monsieur le Comte, I am not setting out to justify his conduct," Sibilet resumed. "I should like to see the Aigues prosper, if it were only to establish the fact of Gaubertin's dishonesty; but we must not abuse him, he is the most

dangerous rascal in all Burgundy, and he is in a position to do you a mischief."

"How?" asked the general, grown thoughtful.

"Gaubertin, such as you see him, is the general agent of the wood merchants, and controls one-third of the Paris timber trade; he directs the whole business in wood—the growth, felling, storage, canal-transport, and salvage. He is a constant employer of labor, and can dictate his own terms. It has taken him three years to make this position, but he has fortified himself in it by now; he is the man of all the timber merchants and he treats them all alike. He has the whole thing cut and dried for their benefit; their business is done more smoothly and with less working expenses than if each man employed a separate agent, as they used to do. For one thing, he has weeded out competition so thoroughly that he has a monopoly of contracts for timber, and the Crown forests are his preserves. The right of cutting timber in the Crown forests is put up periodically to auction, but practically it is in the hands of Gaubertin's clique of timber merchants, for by this time nobody is big enough to bid against them. Last year Monsieur Mariotte of Auxerre, egged on by the Crown ranger, tried to outbid Gaubertin. Gaubertin let him have the trees at the ordinary price to begin with; then when it came to felling the woods the local wood-cutters wanted such wages that Monsieur Mariotte had to send over to Auxerre for men, and when they came the Ville-aux-Fayes men set upon them. Then the ringleader of the union men and the leader of the brawl got into the police court. The proceedings cost money, and Monsieur Mariotte had to pay all the costs, for the men had not a picayune centime. And let me tell you this, by-the-by (for you will have all the poor in the canton set against you)—you make nothing by taking the law of poor folk except ill-will, if you happen to live among them.

"And that was not the end of it. When poor old Mariotte (a decent soul) came to reckon it all over, he was out of pocket

by the contract. He had to pay money down for everything, and to sell for credit; Gaubertin delivered timber at unheard-of prices to ruin his competitor; he actually gave it away at five per cent. below cost price, and poor old Mariotte's credit was badly shaken. In fact, Gaubertin is still after him to this day, and pesters him to that degree that he is going to leave not merely Auxerre, they say, but the department too, and he is doing wisely. So, at one blow, the growers were sacrificed for a long time to come to the timber merchants, who settle the prices among themselves, like brokers and furniture dealers in the Paris salesrooms. But Gaubertin saves the growers so much bother that it is worth their while to employ him."

"And how so?" asked the general.

"In the first place," said Sibilet, "anything that simplifies business is sooner or later to the interest of all concerned. Then the owners of forests are sure of their money. That is the great thing, as you will find out, in all sales of produce. And, lastly, Monsieur Gaubertin is like a father to the laborers; he pays them good wages and finds them constant work; and as the wood-cutters' families live in the neighborhood, there is no damage done to the woods which belong to Gaubertin's timber merchants, or on the estates of Messieurs de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles and others who confide their interests to him. The peasants pick up the dead-wood, and that is all."

"That rogue Gaubertin has not wasted his time!" cried the general.

"Oh! he is a sharp man!" said Sibilet. "He is, as he puts it, steward of the best half of the department now, instead of steward of the Aigues. He charges every one a trifling percentage, but that mere trifle on a couple of million francs brings him in forty or fifty thousand francs a year. 'The hearths of Paris pay for all,' says he. That is your enemy, M. le Comte. So my advice to you is to come to terms with him. He is hand and glove, as you know, with Soudry, the police sergeant at Soulanges, and with Monsieur

Rigou, our mayor at Blangy; the rural police are his tools, so that it will be hard to put down the pilfering which is eating you up. Your woods have been ruined, more particularly during the last two years; so Messieurs Gravelot have a chance in their favor, for they say that, 'by the terms of the lease, you were to pay the expenses of protecting your property; you are not protecting it, so you are doing us an injury, and you must make good our damages.' Which is fair enough, but it is no reason why they should gain the day."

"You must resign yourself to a lawsuit and to a loss of money over it to prevent other lawsuits in future," said the general.

"You will delight Gaubertin," retorted Sibilet.

"How?"

"If you go to law with the Gravelots, you will measure yourself man to man with Gaubertin, who represents them; he would like nothing so much as that lawsuit. As he says, he flatters himself that he will trail you on to the Court of Appeal."

"Ah! the scoundrel! the——"

"Then if you fell and sell your own timber," pursued Sibilet, turning the dagger in the wound, "you will be in the hands of the laborers, who will ask you 'fancy prices,' instead of 'trade wages;' they will 'overweight' you, which means that they will put you in such a position that, like poor old Mariotte, you will have to sell at a loss. If you try to find a lessee, no one will make you an offer, for it stands to reason that no one will run the risk for a private estate that Mariotte ran for the Crown Forest. Moreover, suppose that the old man goes to complain about his losses to the Department. There is an official there, much such a man as your humble servant used to be in his assessor days, a worthy gentleman in a threadbare coat, who sits and reads a newspaper at a table. He is neither more nor less soft-hearted, whether they pay him twelve hundred or twelve thousand francs. Talk to the

Inland Revenue Department, in the person of this gentleman, of allowances and reductions! He will answer you, '*Fiddle-de-dee!*' while he cuts his pen. You are an outlaw, Monsieur le Comte."

"What is to be done?" cried the general. His blood boiled; he strode up and down before the bench.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Sibilet with brutal frankness, "what I am about to say is not in my own interests—you should sell the Aigues and leave the neighborhood."

At these words the general started back as if a bullet had struck him. He looked at Sibilet with a diplomatic expression.

"Is a general of the Imperial Guard to run away from such rogues; and after Madame la Comtesse has taken a liking to the Aigues? Before I would do that I would force Gaubertin to fight me, give him a box on the ears in the market-place of Ville-aux-Fayes, and kill him like a dog."

"Gaubertin is not such a fool as to come into collision with you. And, beside, so important a person as the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes cannot be insulted with impunity."

"I will make a beggar of him; the Troisvilles will back me up; my income is involved."

"You will not succeed in that, Monsieur le Comte; Gaubertin has very long arms. You would only put yourself in an awkward predicament with no possible way out——"

"And how about this lawsuit?" said the general. "We must think of the present."

"Monsieur le Comte, I will insure that you shall gain it," said Sibilet, with something knowing in his air.

"Well done, Sibilet!" said the general, gripping the steward's hand. "And how?"

"You would gain the day in the Court of Appeal in the ordinary course of events. In my opinion, the Gravelots are in the right, but that is not enough, the case is not decided upon its merits; you must be technically in the right as well.

The Gravelots have not observed the proper formalities, and a case always turns upon a question of that kind. The Gravelots ought to have given you notice to look after your woods better. Then you cannot come down upon people for allowances extending over a period of nine years at the expiration of a lease; there is a guarding clause inserted in the lease to prevent that. You will lose your case at Ville-aux-Fayes; perhaps you will lose it again in the higher court, but you will gain the day in Paris. You will be put to ruinous expense; there will be valuations which will cost a great deal. If you gain the case, you will spend twelve or fifteen thousand francs at least over it; but you will gain the day if you are bent upon so doing. The lawsuit will not mend matters with the Gravelots; it will cost them even more. You will be a bugbear to them, you will get a name for being litigious, you will be slandered, but you will gain the day——"

"What is to be done?" repeated the general. If Sibilet's remarks had touched upon the most heart-burning questions, they could not have produced more effect on Montcornet. He bethought himself of that thrashing administered to Gaubertin, and heartily wished that he had laid the horsewhip about his own shoulders. He turned a face on fire to Sibilet, who could read all his torments plainly there.

"What is to be done, Monsieur le Comte?" echoed the other. "There is only one thing to be done. Compound with the Gravelots, but you cannot do it in person. I must act as if I were robbing you. Now, when all our comfort and all our prospects lie in our integrity, it is rather hard for us poor devils to submit to appear dishonest. We are always judged by appearances. Gaubertin, in his time, saved Mademoiselle Laguerre's life, and he, to all appearance, robbed her; but she rewarded him for his devotion by putting him down in her will for a jewel worth ten thousand francs, which Madame Gaubertin wears on her forehead at this day."

The general gave Sibilet a second glance, at least as diplo-

matic as the first, but the steward did not seem to feel the suspicion lurking beneath smiling good-nature.

"My dishonesty will put Monsieur Gaubertin in such high good-humor that I shall gain his good-will," continued Sibilet. "He will listen with all his ears, too, when I come to lay this before him, 'I can get twenty thousand francs out of the count for the Gravelots, provided that they will go halves with me.' If your opponents consent to that, I will bring you back the ten thousand francs. You only lose ten thousand, you save appearances, and there is an end of the lawsuit."

"You are a good fellow, Sibilet," said the general, grasping the steward's hand. "If you can arrange for the future as well as for the present, I consider that you are a jewel of a land-steward——"

"As to the future, you will not starve if the wood is not felled for the next two or three years. Begin by looking after your woods. Between then and now a good deal of water will have flowed down the Avonne, Gaubertin may die, or he may have made enough to retire upon. In short, you will have time to find a competitor; the loaf is big enough to divide; you will find another Gaubertin to match him."

"Sibilet," said the old warrior, amazed at the variety of solutions, "I will give you a thousand crowns if you bring the matter to an end in this way; and then we will think things over."

"Look after your woods before all things, Monsieur le Comte. Go and see for yourself what the peasants have done there during the two years while you have been away. What could I do? I am a steward, not a keeper. You want three foresters and a mounted patrol to look after the Aigues."

"We will defend ourselves. If war it is to be, we will fight. That does not frighten *me*," said Montcornet, rubbing his hands.

"It is a money war," said Sibilet, "and that will seem

harder to you than the other kind. You can kill men, but there is no killing men's interests. You will fight it out on a battlefield where all landowners must fight—called *realization.* It is nothing to grow this and that; you must sell your produce; and if you mean to sell it, you must keep on good terms with everybody."

"I shall have the country people on my side."

"How so?" queried Sibilet.

"By treating them kindly."

"Treat the peasants kindly and the townspeople at Soulanges!" cried Sibilet, squinting hideously, for one eye seemed to gleam more than the other with the irony in his words. "You do not know, sir, what you are setting about. Our Lord Jesus Christ would be crucified there a second time. If you want a quiet life, Monsieur le Comte, do as the late Mademoiselle Laguerre did—and let them rob you, or else strike terror into them. The people, women and children, are all governed in the same way—by terror. That was the grand secret of the Convention and of the Emperor."

"Oh, come now! have we fallen among thieves here?" cried Montcornet.

Adeline came out to them.

"Your breakfast is waiting, dear," she said to Sibilet. "I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Comte, but he has had nothing this morning, and he has been as far as Ronquerolles with some corn."

"Go, by all means, Sibilet."

Montcornet was up and out before day next morning. He chose to return by the Avonne gate to have a chat with his one forester, and to sound the man's disposition.

Some seven or eight acres of forest lay beside the Avonne; a fringe of tall forest trees had been left along the bank on either side, that a river which flowed almost in a straight line for three leagues might preserve its stately character.

The Aigues had once belonged to a mistress of Henri IV., who loved the chase as passionately as the Béarnais. It was she who built, in 1593, the steep, single-span bridge over the Avonne to cross over to the much larger forest purchased for her on the other side of the river. The Avonne gate had been built at the same time as a rendezvous for the hunt, and every one knows that architects in those times lavished all magnificence upon edifices reared for this greatest pleasure of kings and princes. Six avenues met before it in a semicircular space, and in the centre of the crescent rose an obelisk surmounted by a sun once gilded, with the arms of Navarre on the one side, and those of the Comtesse de Moret on the other.

A corresponding crescent-shaped space by the Avonne communicated with the first by a broad, straight walk, whence you saw the angular crown of the Venetian-looking bridge. Between two handsome iron railings (resembling the magnificent ironwork which used to surround the Jardin de la Place Royale in Paris, now, alas! destroyed) stood a hunting-lodge built of brick, with stone string-courses of the same depressed-pyramid pattern as at the castle, stone facings likewise ornamented, and a high-pitched roof.

This bygone style, that gave the house the look of a royal hunting-lodge, is only suitable in towns for prisons, but here the background of forest trees set off its peculiarly grandiose character. The kennels, pheasant-houses, and the old quarters of falconers and prickers were screened by a blind wall. The place had once been the pride of Burgundy; now it lay almost in ruins.

In 1595 a royal train set out from that princely hunting-lodge, preceded by the great hounds beloved of Rubens and Paul Veronese; the horses that pawed the ground are now only seen in Wouvermans' wonderful pictures—mighty white beasts with a bluish shade on the heavy, glossy hindquarters. After these followed footmen in gorgeous array, and the fore-

ground was enlivened by the huntsmen in yellow breeches and high topboots who fill Van de Meulen's great canvasses. The stone obelisk was reared to commemorate that day when the Béarnais went hunting with the beautiful Comtesse de Moret, and bore the date beneath the arms of Navarre. Navarre, not France; for the jealous mistress, whose son was declared to be a prince of the blood, could not endure that the arms of France should meet her eyes to reproach her.

But in 1823, when the general saw the splendid monument, the roof was green with moss on every side. The octagonal glass-panes were dropping out of the loosened leads, the windows looked half-blind. The stones of the weather-worn string-courses seemed to cry out, with countless gaping mouths, against such desecration. Yellow wall-flowers blossomed among the balusters; the ivy stems slipped pale down-covered claws into every cranny.

Everything spoke of a mean neglect. Selfishness, regardless of those to come after it, leaves its stamp on all its present possessions. Two windows above were stopped up with hay; one window on the first floor gave a glimpse of a room full of tools and firewood, and a cow's muzzle thrust from another informed the beholder that, to save himself the trouble of going to and fro between the pheasant-house and the lodge, Courtecuisse had made a cowhouse of the great hall, where the armorial bearings of every owner of the Aigues were painted on the paneled ceiling.

The whole approach to the house was disfigured by a collection of dirty, black palings marking the limits of pigstyes roofed with planks, and little square pens for fowls and ducks. Every six months the accumulated filth was cleared away. Sundry rags were drying on the brambles, which had thrust themselves up here and there

As the general came up the avenue from the bridge, he saw Courtecuisse's wife scouring the earthen pipkin in which she

had just made coffee. The keeper himself was sitting on a chair in the sun looking on, much as a savage might watch his squaw. He turned his head at the sound of footsteps, saw the count his master, and looked foolish.

"Well, Courtecuisse, my boy, I don't wonder that some one else cuts down my wood before the Messrs. Gravelot can get it. Do you take your place for a sinecure?"

"Upon my word, Monsieur le Comte, I have been out in your woods for so many nights that I have got a chill. I was feeling so bad this morning that my wife has been warming a poultice for me; she is cleaning the pipkin now," said the sheepish forester.

"My good fellow," remarked the general, "I only know of one complaint which needs poulticing with hot coffee, and that is hunger. Listen, you rogue! Yesterday I went through the woods belonging to Messrs. de Ronquerolles and de Soulanges, and then through my own. Theirs are properly looked after, and mine is in a pitiable state."

"Ah! Monsieur le Comte, *they* have been here this ever so long, they have; people let them alone. Would you have me fight with half-a-dozen communes? I value my life even more than your woods. Any man who tried to look after your woods properly would get a bullet through his head by way of wages in some corner of the forest."

"Coward!" cried the general, choking down the wrath kindled by Courtecuisse's insolence. "It has been a splendid night, but it has cost me three hundred francs at this moment, and a thousand francs in claims for damages to come. Things must be done differently, or you shall go out of this. All past offenses should be forgiven. Here are my conditions: you shall have all the fines and three francs for each conviction. If I do not find that this plan pays me better, you shall go about your business; while if you serve me well, and manage to put down the pilfering, you shall have a hundred crowns a year. Think it over. Here are six ways," he went on, point-

ing to the alleys, "like me, you must take one; I am not afraid of bullets. Try to find the right one."

Courtecuisse, forty-six years of age, a short man with a full-moon countenance, dearly loved to do nothing. He reckoned upon spending the rest of his days in the hunting-lodge—*his* lodge. His two cows grazed in the forest; he had fuel for his needs; he worked in his garden instead of running about after delinquents. His neglect of his duties suited Gaubertin, and Courtecuisse and Gaubertin understood each other. So he never harassed the wood-stealers except to gratify his own petty hatreds. He persecuted girls who would not accede to his wishes, and people whom he disliked; but it was a long while now since he had borne any one a grudge, his easy ways had won popularity for him.

At the Grand-I-Vert a knife and fork were always set for Courtecuisse, the faggot-stealers were no longer recalcitrant. Both he and his wife received tribute in kind from the marauders. His wood was stacked for him; his vines were layered and pruned. He had vassals and tributaries in all the delinquents, in fact.

Almost reassured as he had been as to his future by the words that Gaubertin let fall about those two acres to be his when the Aigues should be sold, he was rudely awakened from his dream by the general's dry remarks. After four years *he* stood revealed at last; the nature of the bourgeois had come out; he was determined to be cheated no longer. Courtecuisse took up his cap, his game-bag and gun, put on his gaiters, his belt stamped with the brand-new arms of Montcornet, and went forth to Ville-aux-Fayes, with the careless gait which hides the countryman's deepest thoughts. He looked along the woods as he went and whistled to his dogs.

"You complain of the Upholsterer," said Gaubertin, when Courtecuisse had told his tale; "why, your fortune is made! What! the ninny is giving you three francs for each prosecution and all the fines into the bargain, is he? If you can

come to an understanding with your friends, he can have them, and as many as he likes. Prosecutions! let him have them by the hundred. When you have a thousand francs, you will be able to buy the Bâchelerie, Rigou's farm; you can be your own master and work on your own land, or, rather, you can live at ease and set others to work. Only, mind this, you must arrange to prosecute nobody but those who are as poor as Job. You cannot shear those that have no wool. Take the Upholsterer's offer; let him pile up costs for himself if he has a liking for them. Tastes differ, and it takes all sorts to make a world. There was old Mariotte, in spite of all I could say, he liked losses better than profits."

Courtecuisse went home again, profoundly impressed by Gaubertin's wisdom and consumed with a desire to have a bit of land for himself and to be a master like the rest at last.

General Montcornet likewise returned, and on his way gave Sibilet an account of his expedition.

"Quite right, quite right, Monsieur le Comte," said the steward, rubbing his hands, "but there must be no stopping short now you are on the right track. The rural policeman who allowed the spoliation to go on in our fields ought to be changed. It would be easy for Monsieur le Comte to obtain the appointment of mayor of the commune, and to put some one else in Vaudoyer's place—some old soldier who would not be afraid to carry out orders. A great landowner should be master on his own property; and see what trouble we have with the present mayor!"

The mayor of the commune of Blangy, one Rigou, had been a Benedictine monk, but in the year 1 of the Republic he had married the servant-maid of the late curé of Blangy. A married monk was not likely to find much favor at the prefecture after the Restoration, but there was no one else to fill his post, and in 1815 Rigou was still mayor of Blangy. In 1817, however, the bishop had sent the Abbé Brossette to act as officiating priest of the parish. Blangy had done without a

priest for twenty-five years, and, not unnaturally, a violent feud broke out between the apostate and the young churchman whose character has been previously sketched.

People had looked down upon Rigou, but the war between the mayor and the parson brought the former popularity. Rigou had been hated by the peasants for his usurious schemes, but now he was suddenly identified with their interests, political and financial, which were threatened (as they imagined) by the Restoration and the clergy.

Socquard of the Café of Peace was the nominal subscriber to the "Constitutionnel," the principal Liberal paper, but all the local functionaries joined in the subscription, and the journal circulated through a score of hands after it left the café till, at the end of the week, it came to Rigou, who passed it on to Langlumé, the miller, who gave the tattered fragments to any one who could read. The leading articles, written for Paris and the anti-religious *canards*, were seriously read and considered in the valley of the Aigues. Rigou became a hero after the pattern of the "venerable" Abbé Grégoire; and, as in the case of certain Parisian bankers, the purple cloak of popularity served to hide a multitude of sins.

At this particular moment, indeed, Rigou, the perjured monk, was looked upon as a local Francis Keller and a champion of the people, though at no very remote period he would not have dared to walk in the fields after dark lest he should be trapped and die an accidental death. Persecution for political opinion has such virtue that not merely does it increase a man's present importance, but it restores innocence to his past. Liberalism worked many miracles of this kind. But the unlucky paper, which had the wit to find the level of its readers in those days, and to be as dull, scandalous, gullible and besottedly disloyal as the ordinary public, of which the ordinary rank and file of mankind is composed, did, it may be, as much damage to private property as to the church which it attacked.

Rigou flattered himself that a son of the people, reared by the Revolution, a Bonapartist general, in disgrace to boot, would be a sworn enemy of Bourbons and clericals. But the general had his own ideas, and had managed to avoid a visit from M. and Mme. Rigou when he first came to the Aigues.

The enormity of the general's blunder, afterward made worse by a piece of insolence on the part of the countess (the story will be related in its place) can only be recognized after a better acquaintance with the terrible figure of Rigou—the vampire of the valley.

If Montcornet had set out to win the mayor's good-will and courted his friendship, Rigou's influence might have neutralized Gaubertin's power. But far from making the overtures, Montcornet had brought three several actions against the ex-monk in the court of Ville-aux-Fayes; Rigou had already gained one case, but the other two were still in suspense. Then Montcornet's mind had been so busied over schemes for the gratification of his vanity, so full of his marriage, that he had forgotten Rigou; but now when Sibilet advised him to take Rigou's place himself, he called for post-horses and went straight to the prefect.

The general and the prefect, Count Martial de la Roche-Hugon, had been friends since the year 1804. The purchase of the Aigues had been determined by a hint let fall in Paris by the councilor of State. La Roche-Hugon had been a prefect under Napoleon, and remained a prefect under the Bourbons, paying court to the bishop so as to keep his place. Now his lordship had asked for Rigou's removal not once but many times, and Martial, who knew perfectly well how matters stood in the commune, was only too delighted by the general's request. In a month's time, Montcornet was mayor of Blangy.

While Montcornet was staying with his friend at the prefecture, it happened naturally enough that one Groison, a subaltern officer of the old Imperial Guard, came thither about

his pension, which had been stopped on some pretext. The general had once already done the man a service, and, recollecting this, the gallant cavalry officer poured out the story of his woes. He had nothing whatever. Montcornet undertook to obtain the pension, and offered Groison the post of rural policeman at Blangy, and a way at the same time of repaying the obligation by devotion to his patron's interests. So the new mayor and the new rural policeman came into office together, and, as may be imagined, the general gave weighty counsel to his lieutenant.

Vaudoyer, whose bread was thus taken out of his mouth, was a peasant born on the Ronquerolles estate. He was the ordinary rural policeman, fit for nothing but to dawdle about and to make use of his position, so that he was made much of and cajoled by the peasants, who ask no better than to bribe subaltern authority and outpost-sentinels of property. Vaudoyer knew Soudry; for a police sergeant in the gendarmerie fulfills quasi-judicial functions, and the rural police naturally act as detectives if required. Soudry sent his man to Gaubertin, who gave a warm welcome to an old acquaintance, and the pair discussed Vaudoyer's wrongs over a friendly glass.

"My dear fellow," said the mayor of Vive-aux-Fayes, who could suit himself to his company, "the thing that has happened to you is in store for us all. The nobles have come back again, and the Emperor's nobles are making common cause with them. They mean to grind the people down, to establish the old customs and to take away our property; but we are Burgundians, we must defend ourselves and send those *Arminacs* back to Paris. You go back to Blangy; you can be watchman there for Monsieur Polissard, who has taken the lease of the Ronquerolles woods. Never mind, my lad, I will find you plenty of work all the year round. But there is to be no trespassing there, mind you; the woods belong to *us*, and that would spoil it all. Send on all 'wood-cutters' to

the Aigues. And lastly, if there is any sale for faggots, tell the people to buy of us and not of the Aigues. You will be rural policeman again; this won't last long. The general will soon be sick of living among thieves. Did you know that yonder Upholsterer called me a thief? And I the son of one of the most honest Republicans! and the son-in-law of Mouchon, the famous representative of the people, who died without leaving a penny to pay for his funeral!"

The general raised *his* rural policeman's salary to three hundred francs a year. He had a *mairie* built in Blangy, and installed Groison in the premises. Then he found a wife for that functionary in the orphan daughter of one of his own little tenants who owned three acres of vineyard. Groison felt a doglike affection for his master. His fidelity was admitted on all sides, and Groison was feared and respected, but much as an unpopular captain is respected and feared by his crew. The peasantry shunned him as if he had been a leper. They were silent when he came among them, or they disguised their dislike under an appearance of banter. Against such numbers he was powerless.

The delinquents amused themselves by inventing misdemeanors of which no cognizance could be taken, and the old warrior chafed at his impotence. For Groison his functions united the attractions of guerilla warfare with the pleasures of the chase. He hunted down offenders. But war had instilled into him the sportsmanlike instinct of acting openly and above-board, as it were, and he loathed the underhand schemings and thievish dexterity which caused him continual mortification. He very soon found out that the property of other landlords was respected, that it was only at the Aigues that this pilfering went on, and he felt sincere contempt for a peasantry ungrateful enough to rob a general of the Empire, a man so essentially kind-hearted and generous. Hate was soon added to contempt. But in vain did he try to be omni-

present; he could not be everywhere at once; and the delinquencies went on all over the woods at the same time. Groison made it plain to the general that he must organize a complete system of defense; his utmost zeal, he said, was insufficient to cope with the ill-will of the population of the valley, and he revealed its extent.

"There is something behind this, general," he said; "these people are too bold, they are afraid of nothing; it is as if they reckoned on Providence."

"We shall see," said the count.

Unlucky words! A great statesman does not conjugate the verb "to see" in the future tense.

At that time Montcornet had something else on his mind, a difficulty more pressing, as it seemed to him. He must find some one to take his place as mayor while he was absent in Paris, and a mayor must, of necessity, be able to read and write. Looking over the whole commune, he found but one man to answer this description—this was Langlumé, the miller. He could not well have made a worse choice.

In the first place, the interests of the general-mayor and the miller-deputy-mayor were diametrically opposed; and, in the second, Langlumé was mixed up in several shady transactions with Rigou, who lent him money in the way of business. The miller used to buy the right of pasture for his horses in the fields; thanks to his machinations, indeed, he had a monopoly, for Sibilet could not find another purchaser. All the grazing land in the valley commanded good prices, but the fields at the Aigues, the best land of all, were left to the last and fetched the least.

So Langlumé was appointed deputy-mayor for the time being, but in France "for the time being" practically means "once for all," though Frenchmen are credited with a love of change. Langlumé, counseled by Rigou, feigned devotion to the general's interests, and became deputy-mayor about the

time selected by the omnipotent chronicler for the beginning of the drama.

As soon as the new mayor had turned his back, Rigou, who of course was on the Council, had it all his own way at the Board, and the resolutions which he passed there were by no means in the general's interest. He voted money for schemes purely for the benefit of the peasants, though the Aigues must pay most of the rates, and, indeed, paid two-thirds of the taxes, or he refused grants of money which were really needed for supplementing the abbé's stipend, for rebuilding the parsonage, or wages (*sic*) for a schoolmaster.

"If the peasants knew how to read and write, what would become of us?" said Langlumé, with ingenuous frankness. The Abbé Brossette had tried to induce a brother of the order of the *Doctrine chrétienne* to come to Blangy, and the miller was endeavoring to justify to the general the anti-Liberal course taken by the Council.

The general returned from Paris, and so delighted was he with Groison's behavior that he began to look up old soldiers of the Imperial Guard. He meant to organize his defense of the Aigues and put it on a formidable footing. By dint of looking about him and making inquiries among his friends and officers on half-pay, he unearthed Michaud, an old quartermaster in the cuirassiers of the Guard, "a tough morsel," in soldiers' language, a simile suggested by camp cookery, when a bean here and there resists the softening influences of the boiling pot. Michaud picked out three of his acquaintances to be foresters, without fear or blame.

The first of these, Steingel by name, was a thorough Alsacian, an illegitimate son of the General Steingel who fell during the time of Bonaparte's early successes in Italy. Steingel the younger was tall and strong, a soldier of a type accustomed, like the Russians, to complete and passive obedience. Nothing stopped him in his duty. If he had had his orders, he would have laid hands coolly on emperor or pope.

He did not know what danger meant. He had served in the ranks with undaunted courage for sixteen years, and had never received a scratch. He slept out of doors or in his bed with stoical indifference and, at any aggravation of discomfort, merely remarked, "That is how things are to-day, it seems!"

Vatel, the second, was the child of his regiment; a corporal of light infantry, gay as a lark, a trifle light with the fair sex, utterly devoid of religious principle, and brave to the verge of rashness, the man who would laugh as he shot down a comrade. He had no future before him, no idea of a calling, he saw a very amusing little war in the functions proposed to him; and as the Emperor and the Grand Army were his sole articles of faith, he swore to serve the brave Montcornet if the whole world were against him. His was a nature essentially combative; life without an enemy lost all its savor for him; he would have made an excellent attorney; he was a born detective. Indeed, as has been seen, but for the presence of the justice's clerk, he would have haled Granny Tonsard, faggot and all, out of the Grand-I-Vert, and the law in his person would have violated the sanctuary of the hearth.

The third, one Gaillard, a veteran promoted to be sub-lieutenant, and covered with scars, belonged to the laboring class of soldiers. Everything seemed to him to be alike indifferent after the Emperor's fate; but his indifference would carry him as far as Vatel's enthusiasm. He had a natural daughter to support, the place offered him a means of subsistence, and he took it as he would have enlisted in a regiment.

When the general went to the Aigues to dismiss Courtecuisse before his old soldiers came, he was amazed beyond expression at the man's impudent audacity. There are ways of obeying an order which supply a most cuttingly sarcastic commentary upon it, on the part of the slave who carries it out to the letter. Every relation between man and man can be reduced to an absurdity, and Courtecuisse had overstepped the limits of absurdity.

One hundred and twenty-six summonses had been taken out at the tribunal of the peace at Soulanges, which took cognizance of misdemeanors; and almost every one of the delinquents had an understanding with Courtecuisse. In sixty-nine cases judgment had been given, and duly registered and notices served upon the defendants. Whereupon Brunet, delighted at such a fine windfall, did all that was necessary to arrive at the dreary point beyond which the arm of the law cannot reach, whence execution warrants return bearing the superscription "No effects," a formula by which the sheriff's-officer acquaints you with the fact that the person herein described, being in the direst poverty, is already stripped bare of all possessions, and where there is nothing to be had, the creditor, like the crown, loses his rights—of suing. In the present instance the poverty-stricken individuals had been selected with discernment. They lived scattered over five communes round about; and when the sheriff's-officer and his two assistants, Vermichel and Fourchon, had duly gone to find each one, Brunet returned the warrants to Sibilet together with a statement of costs amounting to five thousand francs, and an intimation that he awaited the Comte de Montcornet's further instructions.

Provided with this file of documents, Sibilet waited on his employer, calmly pointed out that these were the results of a too summary order given to Courtecuisse, and was looking on, an unconcerned spectator of one of the most tremendous explosions of wrath ever seen in a French cavalry officer, when Courtecuisse came in at that particular moment to pay his respects and to ask for some eleven hundred francs, the promised bonus on these unlucky convictions. Then temper fairly got the upper-hand of the general. He forgot his rank in the army, he forgot his count's coronet and became a plain trooper again, and poured out a torrent of insulting invective of which he would feel heartily ashamed a little later.

"Oh! eleven hundred francs?" cried he. "Eleven hun-

dred thousand drubbings! Eleven hundred thousand kicks! Ha! Do you suppose that I am not up to your games?—— Show me a clean pair of heels or I will break every bone in your skin!"

At the sight of the general grown purple in the face, at the sound of the first words he uttered, Courtecuisse fled away like a swallow.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Sibilet, in the mildest accents, "you are wrong."

"Wrong!—— *I?*"

"Good gracious, Monsieur le Comte, mind what you are about; that rogue will prosecute you——"

"I do not care a rap—— Look here! that scoundrel goes this very moment. See that he takes nothing of mine away with him and pay him his wages."

Four hours later every tongue in the neighborhood was wagging, as might be expected, over the news. It was said that the general had refused to pay Courtecuisse's wages, poor fellow; had kept two thousand francs belonging to him, and knocked him down.

Queer stories began to circulate. According to the latest reports, the master up at the Aigues had gone out of his mind. Next day Brunet, who had drawn up the execution warrants for the general, served him with a summons to appear before the tribunal. The lion had many fly-pricks in store for him, and this was but the beginning of his troubles.

There are various forms to be gone through before a forester can be installed; for one thing, he must take the oath in a court of first instance. Several days elapsed, therefore, before the three new foresters were properly qualified officials. The general had written to Michaud. He and his newly married wife must come at once, though the lodge was not yet ready for them; but the future head-forester was too busy to leave Paris, his wife's relations had come for the wedding, and it was impossible for him to get away for another fortnight. All

through that fortnight, and while the formalities were being completed, with no good grace, at Ville-aux-Fayes, the wood-stealing was in full swing, there was no one in charge of the forest, and the marauders made the utmost of their opportunities.

The sudden portent of three new foresters made a great sensation in the valley from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. There was that in the appearance of the three stalwart figures, clad in a grand green uniform (the Emperor's color) which plainly said that these were stout fellows, active and sturdy-legged, the sort of men who might be expected to spend their nights in the forest.

There was but one in the whole canton to give the veterans a welcome, and that one was Groison the rural policeman. In his delight at such reinforcements he let drop a few threatening hints, how that before long the thieves should find themselves in a tight place and unable to do any mischief. So the formal declaration of war was not omitted in this covert but fierce struggle.

Then Sibilet called the count's attention to another fact, to wit, that the gendarmerie at Soulanges in general and Police-sergeant Soudry in particular were in reality his uncompromising foes, and pointed out how useful a brigade might be, if imbued with the proper spirit.

"With the right kind of corporal and gendarmes devoted to your interests, you could do as you liked with the neighborhood," said he.

The count hurried to the prefecture, and at his instance the divisionary commandant put Soudry on the retired list and replaced him by one Viollet, a gendarme from the market town. The man bore an excellent character, and both commandant and prefect commended him highly. The whole Soulanges brigade was broken up and distributed over the department by the colonel of gendarmerie (one of Montcornet's old chums), and a new brigade was reconstructed of picked

men, who received secret instructions to see that Montcornet's property was not attacked in future, together with a particular caution not allow the inhabitants of Soulanges to gain them over.

This last revolution was accomplished so quickly that it was impossible to thwart it; it spread dismay through Ville-aux-Fayes and Soulanges. Soudry regarded himself as absolutely destitute, and bitter were his complaints, till Gaubertin contrived to carry his appointment as mayor, so that the control of the gendarmerie might still be in his hands.

Great was the outcry against this tyranny. Montcornet was generally hated. It was not merely that he had changed the course of half-a-dozen human lives, he had wounded the vanity of several fellow-creatures; and the peasantry, excited by hints dropped by the townspeople at Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, or uttered by Rigou, Langlumé, or Guerbet (the postmaster at Conches), imagined that they were about to lose their "rights," as they called them.

The general hushed up the dispute with his sometime forester by paying all claims in full; and as for Courtecuisse, he gave two thousand francs for a little bit of land that lay by a cover side, within the Montcornet estate. Old Rigou, who could never be persuaded to part with the Bâchelerie (as it was called), took a malicious pleasure in selling it now to Courtecuisse at a profit of fifty per cent. The ex-forester, moreover, became one of Rigou's many creatures, for he only paid down half the purchase-money, and the unpaid half gave the old money-lender a hold upon him.

Then began a life of guerilla warfare for Michaud, his three foresters, and Groison. Unweariedly they tramped through the woods, lay out in them of nights, and set themselves to acquire that intimate knowledge which is the forest-keeper's science, and economizes his time. They watched the outlets, grew familiar with the localities of the timber, trained their ears to detect the meaning of every crash of boughs, of every

different forest sound. Then they studied all the faces of the neighborhood, the different families of the various villages were all passed in review, the habits and characters of the different individuals were noted, together with the ways in which they worked for a living. And all this was a harder task than you may imagine. The peasants who lived on the Aigues, seeing how carefully these new measures had been concerted, opposed a dumb resistance, a feint of acquiescence which baffled this intelligent police supervision.

Michaud and Sibilet took a dislike to each other from the very first. The steward's discontented looks, his combined sleekness and gruff manner were hateful to the straightforward outspoken soldier, the flower of the Young Guard. At first sight of his colleague he called him "a queer fish," in his own mind. It was not lost upon him that Sibilet always raised objections whenever any measure was proposed which went to the root of the mischief, and invariably advocated courses where success was doubtful. Instead of calming the general, Sibilet continually irritated him, as this brief sketch must have shown already; he was always urging him to take strong measures, always trying to frighten him by multiplying trouble, by making the most of trifles, by confronting him with old difficulties which sprang up again unconquered. Michaud did not guess that Sibilet had deliberately accepted the part of spy on Montcornet and evil genius; that ever since his installation he had made up his mind to serve two masters, and finally to choose the one that best suited his interests—Montcornet or Gaubertin; but the soldier saw very plainly the steward's grasping and base nature, and could in no wise square this with honesty of purpose. Nor was the deep-seated aversion which separated the pair altogether displeasing to Montcornet. Michaud's personal dislike led him to watch the steward as he would never have condescended to do had the general asked him. And as for Sibilet, he fawned on the head-forester and cringed to him, yet could not induce the true-hearted soldier

to lay aside the excessive civility which he set as a barrier between them.

After these explanatory details the position of the general's various enemies and the drift of his conversation with his two ministers ought to be perfectly intelligible.

IX.

OF MEDIOCRACY.

"Well, Michaud, is it anything new?" asked Montcornet, after the countess had left the dining-room.

"If you will take my advice, general, we will not talk of business here; walls have ears, and I should like to feel sure that what we are going to say will fall into none but our own."

"Very well," said the general; "then let us go out and walk along the field-path toward Sibilet's house; we may be sure that no one will overhear us there."

A few minutes later, while the countess went to the Avonne gate with the Abbé Brossette and Blondet, the general strolled through the fields with Sibilet and Michaud, and heard the history of the affair at the Grand-I-Vert.

"Vatel was in the wrong," was Sibilet's comment.

"They made him see that pretty clearly by blinding him," returned Michaud. "But that is nothing. You know our plan of taking the cattle of the convicted delinquents, general? Well, we shall never succeed. Brunet and his colleague Plissoud likewise will never coöperate loyally with us. They will always contrive to warn the people beforehand. Vermichel, Brunet's assistant bailiff, went to find old Fourchon at the Grand-I-Vert. Marie Tonsard is Bonnébault's sweetheart, so as soon as she heard about it she went to give the alarm at Conches. As a matter of fact, the depredations are beginning again."

"Some very decided step is more and more called for every day," said Sibilet.

"What did I tell you?" cried the general. "Those judgments which condemned the offender to imprisonment in lieu of a fine must be enforced. If they do not pay me damages and costs they shall go to prison instead."

"They think that the law cannot touch them, and say among themselves that no one will dare to arrest them," Sibilet answered. "They fancy that they can frighten you! Some one backs them at Ville-aux-Fayes, for the public prosecutor seems to have forgotten the matter of the condemnations."

"I believe," said Michaud, seeing that the general looked thoughtful, "that by going to a good deal of expense you may still save your property."

"Better spend money than proceed to extreme measures," said Sibilet.

"Then what is your plan?" Montcornet asked, turning to his head-forester.

"It is quite simple," said Michaud; "it is a question of inclosing your park. We should be left in peace then, for any trifling damage done to the woods would be a criminal offense, and as such would be sent to the court of assize for trial."

Sibilet laughed. "At nine francs per rod the building materials alone would cost one-third of the actual value of the property," he said.

"There, there!" Montcornet broke in. "I shall go at once and see the attorney-general."

"The attorney-general may be of the same opinion as the public prosecutor," Sibilet remarked suavely; "such negligence looks as if there was an understanding between the two."

"Very good, that remains to be found out!" cried Montcornet. "If everybody has to be sent packing, judges,

public prosecutor, and the rest of them, attorney-general and all; I shall go if need be to the keeper of the seals about it, or to the King himself!"

A piece of energetic pantomime on Michaud's part made the general turn round upon Sibilet with a "Good-day, my dear sir." The steward took the hint.

"Is it Monsieur le Comte's intention as mayor," he said as he took leave, "to take the necessary steps toward putting a stop to the abuse of gleaning? The harvest is about to begin, and if public notice is to be given that no one will be allowed to glean unless they belong to the commune, and are duly provided with a certificate, we have no time to lose."

"You and Groison settle it between you!" answered the general. "In dealing with such people as these, the law must be carried out to the letter."

And so in a moment of vexation the system which Sibilet had vainly urged for a fortnight gained the day, and found favor in Montcornet's eyes during the heat of anger caused by Vatel's mishap.

When Sibilet was a hundred paces away, the count spoke in a low voice to his head-forester.

"Well, Michaud, my good fellow, what is the matter?" asked the count.

"You have an enemy in your own household, general, and you trust him with plans that you ought not to tell to your own foraging cap."

"I share your suspicions, my good friend," Montcornet answered, "but I will not make the same mistake twice. I am waiting till you understand the management to put you in Sibilet's place, and Vatel can take yours. And yet, what fault have I to find with Sibilet? He is accurate and honest; so far he has not appropriated a hundred francs, and he has been here for five years. His nature is as odious as it can possibly be, and all is said. Beside, what object has he to gain?"

"He most certainly has one, general," Michaud said gravely, "and if you give me leave I will find it out. A purse with a thousand francs in it will loosen that old rogue Fourchon's tongue, though after this morning's performance I suspect that old Fourchon trims his sails to suit every wind. They mean to force you to sell the Aigues, so that old scoundrel of a rope-maker told me. You may be sure of this: there is not a peasant, a small tradesman, farmer or publican, between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes but has his money ready against the day of spoil. Fourchon let me know that his son-in-law, Tonsard, has fixed his choice already. The notion that you will sell the Aigues prevails in the valley; it is like a pestilence in the air. Very probably the steward's lodge and a few acres of land round about it will be the price of Sibilet's services as spy. Not a thing do we say among ourselves here, but it is known in Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet is related to your enemy Gaubertin. The remark that you let fall just now about the attorney-general will, as likely as not, reach him before you can be at the prefecture. You do not know the people hereabouts!"

"Know them?—I know that they are the scum of the earth. To think of giving way before such blackguards! Oh! I would a hundred times sooner set fire to the Aigues myself," cried the general.

"Let us not set fire to it; let us plan out a line of conduct which will baffle their Lilliputian stratagems. To hear them talk, they have made up their minds to go all lengths against you; and by-the-by, general, speaking of fire, you ought to insure all your houses and farm buildings."

"Oh! Michaud, do you know what they mean by 'the Upholsterer?' Yesterday as I came along by the Thune the little chaps called out 'there is the Upholsterer!' and ran away."

"Sibilet would be the one to tell you that," said Michaud down-heartedly; "he likes to see you in a passion. But since

you ask me—well, it is a nickname these blackguards have given you, general."

"Why?"

"Why, on your—your father's account, general."

"Ah! the curs!" shouted the general, turning white with rage. "Yes, Michaud, my father was a furniture dealer, a cabinet-maker. The countess knows nothing about it. Oh! that ever!—— Eh! though, after all, I have set queens and empresses dancing. I will tell her everything this evening," he exclaimed after a pause.

"They say that you are a coward," Michaud went on.

"Ha!"

"They want to know how it was that you got off safely at Essling when you left nearly all your regiment there——"

This accusation drew a smile from the general.

"Michaud, I am going to the prefecture," he said, still under some kind of strong excitement, "if it is only to take out insurance policies. Tell the countess that I have gone. They want war, do they? They shall have it. I will amuse myself by upsetting their schemes for them—these Soulanges tradesmen and their peasants. We are in the enemy's country; we must mind what we are about. Impress it upon the foresters that they must keep well within the law. Poor Vatel, look after him. The countess has been frightened; she must know nothing of all this; if she did she would never come here again!"

Yet neither the general nor Michaud himself knew the real nature of their peril. Michaud had too lately come to this Burgundian valley; he had no idea of the enemy's strength, although he saw the influences at work; and, as for the general, he put too much faith in the power of legislation.

The laws, as fabricated by the modern legislator, have not all the virtue with which they are credited. They are not even carried out equally all over the country; they are modified in application until the practice flatly contradicts the

spirit in which they were framed; and this is a patent fact in every epoch. What historian would be so benighted as to lay down the statement that the decrees of the strongest governments have been equally enforced all over France at once? or that in the time of the Convention, the requisitions of men, stores, and money, pressed as heavily upon Provence, or Lower Normandy, or the borders of Brittany, as upon the population of the great centres of civil life? Where is the philosopher who will deny that two men in two neighboring departments may commit the same crime, and one will lose his head, and the other, and perhaps the worse villain of the two, keeps his upon his shoulders? We must have equality in life, forsooth, and we have inequality in the administration of the law, and in the penalty of death.

As soon as the population of a city reaches a certain limit, the administrative methods are no longer the same. There are about a hundred cities in France in which the intelligence of the citizens is capable of looking beyond the expediency of the present moment, and discerning the wider problems which the law attempts to solve; there the law is intelligently enforced, but in the rest of France, where people understand nothing but their own immediate interests, anything which may interfere with these is a dead letter. Over one-half of France, roughly speaking, the *vis inertiæ* neutralizes the action of legislation of every description. Let it be clearly understood, however, that this passive resistance does not extend to certain essentials of political existence, such as the payment of imperial taxes, the conscription, the punishment of heinous crime; but every attempt in legislation to deal with other than broadly recognized necessities, to touch ways of life, private interests or certain forms of abuse, is frustrated by a common consent of reluctance. Even now, while this work is passing through the press, it is easy to discern the signs of this resistance, the same with which Louis XIV. came into collision in Brittany. Seeing the deplorable state of things

caused by the game laws, there are those who will make an annual sacrifice of some twenty or thirty human lives to preserve a few animals.

For a French population of twenty millions the law is nothing but a sheet of white paper nailed to the church-door or pinned up in the mayor's office. Hence Mouche's words "the papers," an expression for authority. Many a mayor of a canton (putting simple mayors of communes out of the question) makes paper bags for seeds or raisins out of sheets of the Bulletin des Lois.* And as to the mayors of communes, one would be afraid to say how many there are of them that can neither read nor write, or to ask how the registers are kept up in their districts. Every serious administration is no doubt perfectly aware of the gravity of the situation; doubtless, too, it will diminish; but there is something else which Centralization—so much declaimed against in France, where we declaim against any great thing which has any use or strength in it—which Centralization will never reach, and this power against which it is shattered is the same power with which General Montcornet was about to come into collision—for want of a better name it may be called *Mediocracy.*

Great was the outcry against the tyranny of the nobles; and to-day we shriek against the capitalist and abuses of power which, perhaps, after all, are only the inevitable chafings of that social yoke, styled the *Contract* by Rousseau; we hear of constitutions here and charters there, of king and czar and the English parliament; but the leveling process which began in 1789 and made a fresh start in 1830 has in reality paved the way for the muddle-headed domination of the bourgeoisie and delivered France over to them. The presentment of a fact seen unhappily but too often in these days, to wit, the enslavement of a canton, a little town, or a sub-prefecture by a single family, the history of the manner

* The official publication of the laws.

in which a Gaubertin contrived to gain this local ascendency when the Restoration was in full swing, will give a better idea of the crying evil than any quantity of flat assertions. Many an oppressed district will recognize the truth of the picture, and many an obscure down-trodden victim will find in this brief "Here lieth" a publicity given to his private griefs which sometimes soothes them.

When the general concluded a purely imaginary truce for renewed hostilities, his ex-steward had pretty much completed the network of threads in which he held Ville-aux-Fayes and the whole district round it. It will be better to give, in as few words as possible, an account of the various ramifications of the Gaubertin family, for by means of his kin he had involved the whole country in his toils, something as the boa-constrictor winds itself about a tree-trunk so cunningly that the passing traveler mistakes the serpent for some Asiatic vegetable product.

In the year 1793 there were three brothers of the name of Mouchon in the Avonne valley. (It was about that time that the name of the valley was changed; hitherto it had been the valley of the Aigues; now the hated name of the old manor fell out of use and it became the Avonne valley).

The oldest of the brothers, a steward of the manor of Ronquerolles, became a deputy of the department under the Convention. He took a hint from his friend Gaubertin senior (the public accuser who saved the Soulanges family), and in like manner saved the lives and property of the Ronquerolles. This brother had two daughters; one of them married Gendrin the barrister, the other became the wife of Francis Gaubertin. Finally, he died in 1804.

The second brother obtained the post-house at Conches gratis, thanks to the elder's influence. His daughter, his sole offspring and heiress, married a well-to-do farmer in the neighborhood, Guerbet by name. He died in 1817.

But the youngest of the Mouchons took holy orders. He

was curé of Ville-aux-Fayes before the Revolution, curé again after the restoration of the Catholic religion, and now the year 1823 still found him curé of the little metropolis. He had formerly declined the oath, and in consequence for a long time had kept out of sight and lived in the "hermitage" at the Aigues, protected by the Gaubertins, father and son; and now, at the age of sixty-seven, he enjoyed the affection and esteem of his whole parish, for all his characteristics were common to his flock. He was parsimonious to the verge of avarice, was reported to be very rich, and these rumors of wealth strengthened the respect which he met with on all sides. His lordship the bishop thought very highly of the Abbé Mouchon, usually spoken of as "the venerable curé of Ville-aux-Fayes;" it was well known there that the bishop had pressed him more than once to accept a superb living at the prefecture, and his repeated refusals, no less than his reputation for riches, had endeared the Curé Mouchon to his fellow-inhabitants.

At this time Gaubertin, mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, found a solid supporter in his brother-in-law, M. Gendrin, president of the Court of First Instance, while his own son—now the busiest attorney in the place, and a by-word in the arrondissement—talked already of selling his practice after five years. He meant to be a barrister, and to succeed his Uncle Gendrin when the latter retired. President Gendrin's only son was registrar of mortgages.

Soudry junior, who had fulfilled the functions of public prosecutor for two years, was one of Gaubertin's zealous adherents. Clever Mme. Soudry had done her part. She had strengthened her husband's son's present position by immense expectations when she married him to Rigou's only daughter. One day the public prosecutor would inherit a double fortune, the ex-monk's money would come to him as well as Soudry's savings, and the young fellow would be one of the wealthiest and most important men in the department.

The sub-prefect of Ville-aux-Fayes was a M. des Lupeaulx, a

nephew of the secretary of a State department. He was meant to marry Mlle. Elise Gaubertin, the mayor's youngest daughter. Like her eldest sister, she had a portion of two hundred thousand francs, *beside expectations*. Young des Lupeaulx had unwittingly done a clever thing on first coming to the place in 1819 when he fell straightway in love with Elise; but for his eligibility as a suitor, he would long since have been compelled to ask for an exchange, but as it was, he belonged prospectively to the Gaubertin clan, whose chieftain's eyes were fixed less upon the nephew than upon the uncle in Paris. For all the uncle's influence, in his nephew's interest, was at Gaubertin's disposition.

And so the church, the magistracy, permanent and removable, the municipality and the administration, the four feet of power, walked at the mayor's will.

This power was strengthened in regions above and below its immediate sphere of action by the following means:

The department in which Ville-aux-Fayes is situated is sufficiently populous to nominate six deputies. Ever since the creation of the Left-Centre in the Chamber, Ville-aux-Fayes had been represented by Leclercq, who, it may be remembered, was Gaubertin's son-in-law and the agent in charge of the city wine-cellars, and since had become a governor of the Bank of France. The number of electors which this well-to-do valley furnished to the grand electoral college was sufficiently considerable to insure the election of M. de Ronquerolles (the patron acquired, as explained, by the Mouchon family), even if an arrangement had to be made. The electors of Ville-aux-Fayes gave their support to the prefect on condition that the Marquis de Ronquerolles should continue to be elected by the grand college. So Gaubertin, the first to hit upon this electioneering expedient, was in good odor at the prefecture, which he saved many disappointments. The prefect managed to return three out-and-out Ministerialists as well as two deputies for the Left-Centre, and as one of these two last was a

governor of the Bank of France, and the other the Marquis de Ronquerolles, the Comte du Sérizy's brother-in-law, there was little to alarm the cabinet. So the Ministry of the Interior looked upon the elections in this particular department as very well regulated.

The Comte de Soulanges, a peer of France, a marshal-designate, and a faithful adherent of the House of Bourbon, knew that his estates and woods were well managed and properly guarded by Soudry and Lupin the notary. He might be considered to be Gendrin's patron, for he had successfully procured for him the posts of judge and president, with the coöperation of M. de Ronquerolles.

Messrs. Leclercq and de Ronquerolles took their seats in the Centre-Left, and toward the Left rather than to the Centre side, a position in politics which presents numerous advantages to those who can change their political conscience like a suit of clothes.

M. Leclercq's brother had obtained the post of tax-collector at Ville-aux-Fayes, and Leclercq himself, the banker-deputy of the arrondissement, had recently purchased a fine estate, bringing in thirty thousand francs a year, together with a park and a castle, the whole lying just outside the town—a position which enabled him to influence the whole canton.

In these ways Gaubertin had power in the higher regions of the State, in the two Chambers, and in the Cabinet; he could count upon influence both potent and active, and as yet he had not weakened it by asking for trifles, nor strained it by too many serious demands.

Councilor Gendrin, appointed vice-president by the Chamber, was the real power in the Court-Royal. The first president, one of the three Ministerialist deputies returned by the department, and an indispensable orator of the Centre, was away for half the year and left his court to Vice-president Gendrin.

The prefect himself was another deputy, and the prefect's

right hand was a member of his council, a cousin of Sarcus the justice, called Money-Sarcus by way of distinction. But for the family considerations which bound Gaubertin and young des Lupeaulx, Mme. Sarcus' brother would have been "put forward" as sub-prefect of the arrondissement of Ville-aux-Fayes. Mme. Sarcus (wife of Money-Sarcus) was a Vallat of Soulanges, and related to the Gaubertins. It was said of her that she had shown a preference for the Notary Lupin when he was a young man; and now, though she was a woman of five-and-forty, with a grown-up son, an assistant-surveyor, Lupin never went to the prefecture but he paid his respects to Mme. Money-Sarcus or dined with her.

The nephew of Guerbet, the postmaster, was, as we have seen, the son of the Soulanges tax-collector, and filled the important post of examining magistrate at the tribunal of Ville-aux-Fayes. The third magistrate was a Corbinet, son of the notary of that name, and, of course, belonged body and soul to the all-powerful mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes, and (to close the list of legal functionaries) the deputy-magistrate was Vigor junior, son of the lieutenant of gendarmerie.

Now Sibilet's father, who had been clerk of the court ever since there had been a court at all, had married his sister to M. Vigor, the aforesaid lieutenant of gendarmerie at Ville-aux-Fayes. Sibilet himself, good man, was a father of six, and a cousin of Gaubertin's father through his wife, a Gaubertin-Vallat.

Only eighteen months ago the united efforts of both deputies, of M. de Soulanges and President Gendrin, had successfully created a post of commissary of police and filled it. The elder Sibilet's second son had the appointment. Sibilet's eldest daughter had married M. Hervé, a schoolmaster; within a year of the marriage his establishment was transformed, and Ville-aux-Fayes received the boon of a head-master of a grammar school.

Another Sibilet, Maître Corbinet's clerk, looked to the

Gaubertins, Leclercqs, and Soudrys to be his sureties when the time should come for buying his employer's practice; and the youngest found employment in the Internal Revenue Department for the time being, with a prospect of succeeding to the position of registrar when the present occupant should reach the limit of service prescribed for obtaining a pension.

Sibilet's youngest daughter, a girl of sixteen, was engaged to be married to Captain Corbinet, Maître Corbinet's brother, master of the post-office, and this completes the history of the Sibilet family.

The postmaster at Ville-aux-Fayes was Vigor senior, brother-in-law of Leclercq of the city cellars. He commanded the National Guard. Mme. Sibilet's sister, an elderly spinster and a Gaubertin-Vallat, held the office of stamp distributer.

Look where you liked in Ville-aux-Fayes, you found some member of the invisible coalition, headed avowedly (for the fact was openly recognized by great and small) by the mayor, the general agent of the timber trade—Monsieur Gaubertin!

If you left the seat of the sub-prefecture and went further down the Avonne valley, you found Gaubertin again ruling Soulanges through the Soudrys, and Lupin the deputy-mayor, the steward of the manor of Soulanges, in constant communication with the count; through Sarcus, justice of the peace, and his son's wife's father; through Guerbet the tax-collector and Gourdon the doctor, who had married a Gendrin-Vattebled. Gaubertin governed Blangy through Rigou, and Conches through the postmaster, whose word was law in his own commune. And by the way in which the ambitious mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes spread his influence far and wide in the Avonne valley, it may be imagined how far he made himself felt in the rest of the arrondissement.

The head of the firm of Leclercq was put forward as principal deputy. It had been agreed upon from the very first that he would relinquish his place to Gaubertin so soon as he himself should obtain the post of receiver-general of the de-

partment. Young Soudry, the public prosecutor, was to become attorney-general to the Court-Royal; while the rich Examining-magistrate Guerbet was to be one of the councilors. This general promotion, far from being oppressive, was to insure the advancement of others, such, for instance, as Vigor the deputy-magistrate, or Francois Vallat, Money-Sarcus' wife's cousin, at present only prosecutor-substitute. In fact, all the ambitious young men in the valley, and every family which had anything to gain, were so many supporters of the coalition.

Gaubertin's influence was so serious and so powerful in the district that its secret springs of wealth, the savings hoarded up by the Rigous, Soudrys, Gendrins, Guerbets, and Lupins, nay, by Money-Sarcus himself, were all controlled by him. Ville-aux-Fayes, moreover, believed in its mayor. Gaubertin's ability was not more cried up than his honesty and his readiness to oblige. He was at the service of all his relations; there was not one of his constituents but could claim his help; but it was a game of give and take. His town council looked up to him. Wherefore the whole department blamed M. Mariotte of Auxerre for crossing good M. Gaubertin's path.

The Ville-aux-Fayes townspeople took their abilities for granted, since nothing had ever occurred to put them to the test; they prided themselves simply and solely on having no outsiders among them, and thought themselves excellent patriots. Thus nothing escaped this tyranny, so carefully thought out that it was scarcely recognized as tyranny, for the spectacle of natives filling every high place struck the ordinary mind as a triumph of native intellect. For instance, when the Liberal Opposition declared war against the Bourbons of the elder branch, Gaubertin saw an opening for a natural son of his, for whom he was at a loss to provide. His wife did not know of the existence of this Bournier, as he was called, who for a long time had been kept in Paris. Leclercq had looked after him till he became a foreman in a printing

office, but now Gaubertin set him up as a printer in the town of Ville-aux-Fayes. Acting on the prompting of his protector, the young fellow brought out a newspaper three times a week, and the "Courrier de l'Avonne" began by taking away the official announcements from the paper of the prefecture. This local sheet, while supporting the Ministry, inclined to the Centre-Left, and obtained a large circulation by publishing a summary of the market reports of Burgundy; but in reality it was worked in the interests of the Rigou-Gaubertin-Soudry triumvirate. Young Bournier, the head of a fairly large establishment which already began to pay very well, paid court to one of Attorney Maréchal's daughters, and appeared to be well received.

There was one outsider in the great Avonnaise family in the person of the district surveyor; but the greatest efforts were being made to exchange the stranger for a native Sarcus, Money-Sarcus' son, and in all likelihood this broken thread in the mesh would very shortly be repaired.

The formidable league which filled every public and private position with its own members, draining the wealth of the neighborhood, and clinging to power as the remoræ cling to the ship's keel, was not visible at first sight. General Montcornet had no suspicion of it, and the prefecture congratulated itself upon the flourishing condition of Ville-aux-Fayes. At the Home Office it was said: "There is a model sub-prefecture for you, everything there goes on wheels! If all arrondissements were like that one, how happy we should be!" And family cliques came so effectually to the aid of local feeling, that here as in many another little town, nay, prefecture, any outsider appointed to an official position would have been forced to leave the district within the year.

The victim of all-powerful bourgeois clannishness is so thoroughly entangled and gagged that he does not dare to complain; like the intruding snail in a beehive, he is sealed up, be-waxed and be-glued. There are great inducements to

this course of invisible, intangible tyranny; there is the strong desire to be among one's own people, to see after one's own bits of property; there is the mutual help which relatives can afford, and the guarantees given to the administration by the fact that its agent is working under the eyes of his fellow-citizens and amenable to local public opinion. Moreover, nepotism is not confined to little country towns; it is quite as common in higher branches of the civil service. But what is the actual outcome? Local interests triumph over wider and larger considerations; the intentions of the central government in Paris are completely defeated, the real facts of the case are twisted out of all knowledge, the province laughs in the face of the central authority. Great national necessities once supplied, in fact, the remaining laws, generally speaking, instead of modifying the character of the people are modified by them, and the masses, instead of adapting themselves to the law, adapt the law to themselves.

Any one who has traveled in the south or west of France, or in Alsace (unless indeed he travels simply for the sake of seeing landscapes and public monuments and sleeping in the inns), must admit that these observations are just. As yet the effects of bourgeois nepotism only appear as isolated symptoms, but the tendencies of recent legislation will aggravate the disease, and this domination of dullness may cause fearful evils, as will be abundantly evident in the course of this drama in the Aigues valley.

Under old systems, overturned more rashly than is generally thought, under the Monarchy and the Empire, this kind of abuse was kept in check by an upper hierarchy; a counterpoise was found in class distinctions which were senselessly denominated "privilege." But as soon as a general scramble up the soaped pole of authority begins, "privilege" ceases to exist. Would it not be wise, moreover, to recognize at once that since there must be a "privileged class," it had better consist of those who are openly and avowedly privileged?

that those who have taken their position by stratagem and intrenched themselves in it by cunning, private self-seeking, and fraudulent imitations of public spirit, are only doing the work of despotism over again on a fresh foundation and a notch lower in the social scale? Shall we not have overthrown a race of noble tyrants who had the interests of their country at heart, only to create a race of self-seeking tyrants in their stead? Shall authority issue from cellars instead of spreading its influence from its natural place? These things should be borne in mind. The Parochialism just portrayed will gain ground in the Chamber of Deputies.

Montcornet's friend, the Comte de la Roche-Hugon, had been dismissed a short time before the general's last visit. This dismissal drove the statesman into the Liberal Opposition; he became one of the leading lights of the Left, and then promptly deserted his party for an embassy. To him succeeded, luckily for Montcornet, a son-in-law of the Marquis de Troisville, the Comte de Castéran, Mme. de Montcornet's uncle, who received him as a relation, and graciously begged him to renew his acquaintance with the prefecture. The Comte de Castéran listened to Montcornet's complaints, and asked the bishop, the colonel of gendarmerie, the attorney-general, Councilor Sarcus, and the commandant of the division, to meet him at breakfast on the following day.

Baron Bourlac, the attorney-general, first brought into prominence by the trials of la Chanterie and Rifaël, was a man of a kind invaluable to a government, by reason of his stanch support of any party in power. He owed his elevation to a fanatical worship of the Emperor, and his continuance in his judicial rank partly to an inflexible nature, partly to the professional conscience which he brought to the performance of his duties. As a public prosecutor he had once ruthlessly hunted out the remnants of Chouannerie, now he prosecuted Bonapartists with equal zeal. But time and storms had softened him down and, as most frequently happens, the hero of

terrific legends had grown very charming in his ways and manner.

The Comte de Montcornet set forth his position, and mentioned his head-forester's fears. Then he began to talk about the necessity of making examples and of maintaining the cause of property.

His audience of high officials heard him out with solemn faces, giving him vague generalities by way of answer. "Oh, of course, of course, force should be on the side of the law. Your cause is the cause of every landowner. We will give the matter our attention, but in our position we are obliged to be very careful. A monarchy is bound to do more for the people than the people would do for themselves if they were sovereign rulers as in 1793. The people have heavy burdens; our duty to them is as clear as our duty to you."

Then the inexorable attorney-general suavely set forth various thoughtful and benevolent views touching the lower orders, which would have convinced future constructors of Utopias that the higher ranks of the officialdom of that day were not unacquainted with the knotty points of the problem to be solved by modern society.

It may not be out of place to say here that, at this very time, during the epoch of the Restoration, sanguinary collisions were very common all over the kingdom, and upon this very point in question. Wood-stealing and other peasants' encroachments were regarded as vested interests. The Court and the Ministry strongly objected to all disturbances of this kind and to the bloodshed consequent upon forcible repression, successful and unsuccessful. It was felt that severity was needed, but the local authorities were made to feel that they had blundered if the peasants were put down harshly, and if on the other hand they showed any weakness they were cashiered. So prefects were apt to equivocate when these deplorable accidents happened.

At the very outset Money-Sarcus had made a sign (unseen

by Montcornet) which the prefect and public prosecutor both understood, a sign which changed the tone of the conversation that followed. The attorney-general knew pretty much how things were in the Aigues valley through his assistant, young Soudry.

"I can see that there will be a terrible struggle," the public prosecutor had told his chief (he had come over from Ville-aux-Fayes on purpose to see him). "We shall have gendarmes killed—I know that from my spies; and the trial will be an ugly business. No jury will be got to convict with a prospect of the hatred of twenty or thirty families before them; they will not give us the heads of the murderers, nor the amount of penal servitude which we shall require for the accomplices. The utmost we should obtain, if you conducted the prosecution in person, would be a few years' imprisonment for the worst offenders. It is better to shut our eyes, for, if we keep them open, the end of it all will be a collision which will cost lives, and perhaps six thousand francs to the Government, to say nothing of the expense of keeping the men in the hulks. That is paying exceedingly dear for a victory which will make the weakness of justice apparent to all eyes."

Montcornet was incapable of suspecting the influence of "mediocracy" in the valley, so he never so much as mentioned Gaubertin, who stirred up and rekindled the smouldering flames.

When breakfast was over, the baron took Montcornet's arm and carried him off to the prefect's study. When they issued from this conference Montcornet wrote to his wife that he was setting out for Paris, and should not return for a week. The wisdom of the measures advised by Baron Bourlac will be seen later on, when they were carried into execution. If a way yet remained to the Aigues of escaping the "ill-will," it was only through the policy which Bourlac privately recommended to Montcornet.

These explanations will seem tedious to those who care for nothing but the interest of the story, but it is worth while to observe here that the historian of manners is bound by rules even more stringent than those which control the historian of fact. The historian of manners is bound to make everything appear probable—even truth itself, while, in the domain of history proper, the impossible requires no apology; these facts actually happened, and the writer simply records them. The ups and downs of family and social life are created by a host of small causes, and every one of these has a bearing on the event.

The man of science must clear away the masses of an avalanche which swept away whole villages, to show you the fallen fragments of stone on the mountain side where the mass of snow first began to gather. If this were merely the story of a man's suicide—there are five hundred suicides in Paris every year—it is a hackneyed melodrama, and every one is content with the briefest account of the victim's motives; but that Property should commit suicide!—who will believe it, in these days when wealth appears to be dearer than life itself? *De re vestra agitur*, wrote the fabulist—this story touches the interests of all owners of property. Let it borne in mind that if a canton and a little country town are in league, in the present instance, against an old general who, despite his reckless courage, had escaped the hazards of countless previous battles, the same kind of conspiracy is set on foot, in more than one department, against men who are striving for the general good. Every man of genius, every great statesman, every great agricultural reformer, every innovator, in short, is continually threatened by this kind of coalition.

This last indication of what may be called the political bearing of the story not only brings out every actor in his true aspect and gives significance to the most trifling details of the drama: it turns a searching light upon a scene where all social interests form the stage-mechanism.

X.

A HAPPY WOMAN'S PRESENTIMENTS.

As the general stepped into his carriage and drove away to the prefecture, the countess reached the Avonne gate, where Michaud and Olympe had taken up their abode some eighteen months ago.

Any one who remembered the hunting-lodge in its previous condition, described above, might have thought that the place had been rebuilt. The bricks that had dropped out or suffered from the weather had been replaced and the walls had been tuck-pointed; the white balusters stood out against a bluish background of clean slates, and the whole house looked cheerful once more. The labyrinth of pig-styes had been cleared away, new gravel had been laid down, and the paths were rolled by the man who had charge of the alleys in the park. The window-facings, entablatures, and cornices, indeed all the carved stonework, had been restored, and the monument of the past shone in all its ancient glory.

The poultry-yard, stable, and cowsheds had been removed to the precincts by the pheasant-house hidden away behind the wall; all the unsightly details had disappeared, but the sounds, the low cooing, and the flapping of wings mingled with the ceaseless murmur of the forest trees—a most delicate accompaniment to the endless song of Nature. There was something of the wildness of lonely forests about the spot, something, too, of the trim grace of an English park. And the hunting-lodge looked indescribably stately, fair, and a pleasant dwelling, now that its surroundings were in keeping with the exterior, just as a happy young housewife's care had entirely transformed the lodge within since the days of Courtecuisse's brutish slovenliness.

It was in the height of summer. The scent of flowers in

the garden-beds blended with the wild scent of the woods and of mown grass from the meadows in the park.

The countess and her two guests, coming along a winding footpath that led to the hunting-lodge, saw Olympe Michaud sitting in the doorway at work upon baby clothes. The woman's figure, and her work as she sat there sewing, gave the touch of human interest, the final touch which the landscape lacked; a kind of interest which appeals to us in real life so strongly that there are painters who have tried, and tried mistakenly, to introduce it into landscape pictures, forgetting that if they really render the spirit of the landscape upon their canvas its grandeur reduces the human figure into insignificance. The scene, as we actually see it, is always circumscribed; the spectator's power of vision can only include sufficient of the background to place the figure in its proper setting. Poussin, the Raphael of France, when he painted his "Arcadian Shepherds," subordinated the landscape to the figures; his insight told him how pitiable and poor man becomes in a canvas where Nature takes the chief place.

Here was August in all its glory among fields ready for the harvest, a picture to arouse simple and strong emotion. It was like a realization of the dream of many a man who has come to long for rest after a storm-tossed existence and a life of change made up of good and evil fortune.

Let us give the history of this household in a few words. When Montcornet had first talked of the head-forester's place at the Aigues, Justin Michaud had not responded very warmly to the gallant cavalry officer's advances. He was thinking at the time of going into the army again, but in the thick of the conference which brought him frequently to the Hôtel Montcornet, Michaud set eyes on madame's own woman, and his ideas underwent a change.

The girl came of honest farmers in Alençon, and was something of an heiress, for she had expectations—twenty or thirty thousand francs would be hers sooner or later; but her father

and mother, finding themselves in difficulties (a not uncommon case with tillers of the soil who have married young, and whose parents are still living), and consequently unable to give their daughter any education, had intrusted her to the young countess, who placed her about her person. Mlle. Olympe Charel was not allowed to take her meals at the servants' table. The countess had her instructed in dressmaking and plain needlework, and was rewarded by the whole-hearted fidelity of which a Parisian stands in need.

Olympe Charel was a pretty, rather plump Norman, with a shade of gold in her fair hair, and bright eyes that lighted up her face, but a delicate, haughtily curved nose was perhaps one of her most striking characteristics, and a certain maidenliness in spite of the Spanish curves of her figure. She had all the air of distinction which a young girl, of extraction somewhat above the laboring class, can acquire from contact with a mistress who admits her to a certain degree of intimacy. She was well-mannered and becomingly dressed, expressed herself well, and carried herself with ease. Michaud soon fell in love, and the more readily when he learned that his fair one would have a pretty fortune some day.

It was the countess who made difficulties. She was unwilling to lose a maid so useful to her; but when Montcornet unfolded his plans for the Aigues, nothing was wanting but the parents' consent for the marriage to take place, and that consent was promptly given.

Michaud, like his master, regarded his wife as a superior being, to be obeyed without reservation. He saw before him all the happiness for which a soldier longs when he leaves the army, a quiet life, plenty of outdoor occupation, and just sufficient bodily weariness to make rest delightful. Michaud's courage was established beyond cavil, yet he had never received any serious wound, and had had no experience of the physical suffering which sours many a veteran's temper. Like all really strong natures he was equable, and his wife gave him

unbounded love. Their life at the lodge had been one long honeymoon, with no discordant note in their surroundings to break in upon their happiness. Rare fortune! Not always do the circumstances of our outward life harmonize with the life of the inner self.

The scene was so picturesque that the countess stopped Blondet and the Abbé Brossette. As they stood, they could see the charming Mme. Michaud without being seen by her.

"I always come this way when I walk in the park," the countess said in a whisper; "I like to look at the hunting-lodge and its pair of turtle-doves; it is like some favorite beautiful view to me." She leaned on Émile Blondet's arm, that he might feel the meaning underlying her words, that where speech fell short touch might convey a subtle significance which women will divine.

"I wish I were a gatekeeper at the Aigues!" exclaimed Blondet, with a smile—— "Why, what is it?" he added, as a shade of sadness crossed the lady's face at those words.

"Nothing."

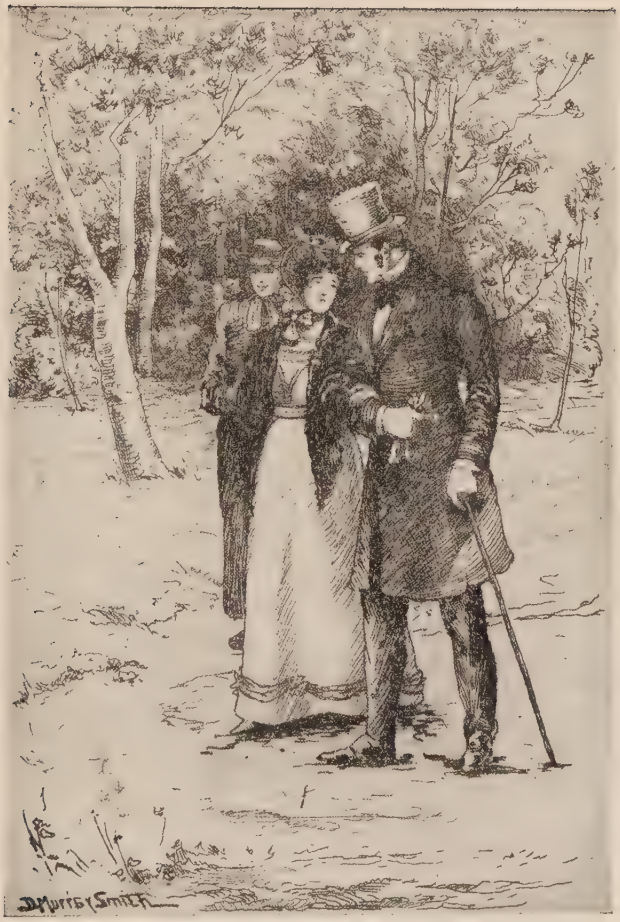
Whenever womankind have something weighing on their minds, they will tell you hypocritically that it is nothing.

"But possibly the thought that preys upon us would seem very trifling to you, though to us it is terrible. I, for my own part, envy Olympe her lot——"

"Wishes are heard in heaven?" said the Abbé Brossette, with a smile that relieved the solemnity of his words.

Something in Olympe's attitude and expression told Mme. de Montcornet of anxiety and fears, and she too grew anxious. A woman can read another woman's thoughts from the way she draws her needle in and out, and, indeed, the head-forester's wife, in her pretty pink dress, her hair coiled daintily about her head, seemed to be turning over sad thoughts in her mind, thoughts but little in keeping with her dress, her work, and the sunny day. Now and again she looked up and fixed unseeing eyes on the gravel paths or the green thickets,

SHE LEANED ON ÉMILE BLONDET'S ARM.


D. Murray Smith

and the anxious expression on her fair forehead was the more artlessly displayed because she thought herself unobserved.

"And I was envying her! What can darken her thoughts?" the countess said, looking at the curé.

"Can you explain, madame," said the abbé, speaking softly, "how it is that our most perfect bliss is always troubled by dim forebodings?"

"Curé," said Blondet smiling, "you permit yourself Delphic answers. 'Nothing is stolen, everything is paid for,' so Napoleon said."

"Such a saying in the Emperor's mouth becomes a generalization wide as humanity," said the abbé.

"Well, Olympe, what is the matter, child?" asked the countess, stepping in front of the others toward her ex-waiting-maid. "You look dreamy and thoughtful. Is it possible that there has been a tiff at home?"

Mme. Michaud rose to her feet. Her face wore a different expression already.

"I should dearly like to know what has brought the shadow over that brow, my child," said Émile Blondet paternally, "when we are almost as nicely housed here as the Comte d'Artois at the Tuileries. This is like a nightingale's nest in a thicket. And have we not the bravest man of the Young Guard for a husband, a fine fellow, who loves us to distraction? If I had known the advantages Montcornet offers you here, I would have left off writing padding for newspapers and turned head-keeper myself!"

"Oh, this is not the place for any one with your genius, sir!" said Olympe, smiling back at him, as if he and she were old acquaintances.

"Why, my dear little woman, what is the matter?" asked the countess.

"Well, then, my lady, I am afraid——"

"*Afraid!* of what?" the countess asked quickly. The words put her in mind at once of Mouche and Fourchon.

"Afraid of the wolves?" suggested Émile, making a warning sign which Olympe failed to understand.

"No, sir, it is the peasants. In Perche, where I was born, there were certainly a few bad characters. But I could not believe that there would be such bad people, and so many of them in a place, as there are here. I do not pretend to meddle in Michaud's business, but he trusts the peasants so little that he goes armed in broad daylight if he is going through the forest. He tells his men to be always on the lookout. Now and again there are figures prowling about here; they mean no good. The other day I was going along by the wall to the spring at the head of the little stream with the sandy bed, which flows through the wood and out into the park through the grating five hundred paces away. They call it the Silver Spring, because Bouret (so they say) strewed silver spangles in it. Do you know it, my lady? Very well, then, there were two women there washing clothes, just where the stream crosses the footpath to Conches. I heard them talking; they did not know that I was near. You can see our house from the spot. The two old creatures were looking at it and one said to the other, 'What a lot of expense they are going to for him that has taken old Courtecuisse's place!' Then the other one said, 'Wouldn't you have to pay a man well for plaguing poor folk, as he does?' 'He will not plague them long,' answered the first one; 'this sort of thing must be put a stop to. After all, we have a *right* to cut wood. Madame des Aigues, that's gone, allowed us to take faggots. We have done it these thirty years; so it is an established right.' 'We shall see how things go this winter,' the second one went on. 'My man has sworn, I know, by all that's sacred, that we shall get our firewood, and that all the gendarmerie on earth shall not hinder us, and that he will do it himself, and so much the worse for them.' 'Lord sakes! we must not die of cold, and we must certainly bake our bread;' said the first woman. 'They don't want for nothing, they

don't! That blackguard Michaud's little wife will be well taken care of!' In fact, my lady, they said shocking things about me, and you, and Monsieur le Comte. Then at last they said that first the farm buildings would be fired, and then the castle——"

"Pooh!" said Émile, "old wives' gossip. They used to rob the general; now they will not rob him any longer and they are furious: that is all. Just bear in mind that the Government is always the strongest everywhere, even in Burgundy; and they would soon have a regiment of horse down here if there was any occasion for it."

The curé behind the countess was making signals to Olympe to cut short the tale of fears, due surely to the second-sight of strong love. When a soul finds its all-in-all in another soul, it scans the whole horizon about that central figure to discern the elements of the future. Love brings a woman the presentiments which at a later day become the second-sight of motherhood. Hence the melancholy and unaccountable moods of sadness which bewilder men. The great cares and constant stir of life prevent this concentration in a man, but for a woman all strong love becomes an active contemplation more or less lucid, more or less profound, according to individual character.

"Come, child, show Monsieur Émile over your house," said the countess. These new thoughts had put La Péchina out of her mind, and she had quite forgotten the purpose of her visit.

The inside of the house had been restored and brought into harmony with the imposing exterior. An architect and workmen had come from Paris (a slight warmly resented by Ville-aux-Fayes), and the original partition-walls were restored, so that now there were, as at first, four rooms on the first floor. An old-fashioned balustraded wooden staircase rose at the further end of the lobby, behind it lay the kitchen, and on either side of it the two oak-paneled parlors with coats of

arms painted on the ceilings. The furniture had been chosen to match these old-fashioned decorations by the artist who had restored the rooms at the Aigues.

In those days it was not the fashion to set an exaggerated value on the wreckage of bygone centuries. The lumber rooms of furniture-stores at Ville-aux-Fayes were full of old high-backed tapestry-covered chairs in carved walnut-wood, console tables, old timepieces, tables, sconces, and woven hangings; solid furniture worth half as much again as the flimsy stuff turned out by the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Two or three cartloads of this old lumber, carefully chosen by the aforesaid architect, and some disused furniture from the castle, had transformed the parlor at the Avonne gate into something like an artist's creation. The dining-room had been painted the color of the natural wood, a paper of the kind known as Highland-plaid covered the walls. Mme. Michaud had hung white green-fringed dimity curtains in the windows, the mahogany chairs were covered with green stuff, and two huge mahogany sideboards and a mahogany dining-table completed the furniture. Prints of soldiers adorned the walls. The keeper's guns were stacked on either side of the porcelain stove. Rumor exaggerated these inexpensive glories until they became the last word of Oriental luxury. Strange it was! These things aroused Gaubertin's covetousness, and when, in his own mind, he pulled the Aigues to pieces, he reserved that palatial lodge for himself.

The three principal bedrooms occupied the second floor. Here you beheld those India-muslin curtains associated in a Parisian's mind with the pecular notions and mental attitude of those who conform to bourgeois standards. Here, if Mme. Michaud had been left to herself, she would have had satin wall-papers. Her own room contained a four-post bedstead, with a curving head and coronal from which the embroidered muslin curtains hung. The rest of the furniture was of the ordinary mahogany, Utrecht-velvet-covered kind to be seen

everywhere; but the mantel displayed an alabaster clock flanked by two gauze-shrouded candlesticks and vases of artificial flowers beneath glass shades—the quartermaster's marriage-gifts to his bride. The rooms in the roof, where La Péchina, the cook, and the man belonging to the establishment were lodged, had also shared in the benefits of the restoration.

"Olympe, child, there is something else," said the countess (she had gone into Mme. Michaud's room, leaving Émile and the curé, who went downstairs together, when they heard the bedroom door close).

The Abbé Brossette had managed to get a word with Mme. Michaud. So now, to avoid mentioning the fears which were far more serious than her words had led them to suppose, she made a mysterious communication which reminded Mme. de Montcornet of the purpose of her visit.

"I love Michaud, my lady, as you know. Very well, then, would you be pleased to have a rival always with you in the house?"

"A rival!"

"Yes, my lady. That little gypsy you gave to me to look after has fallen in love with Michaud. She does not know it herself, poor child! For a long while her behavior was a mystery to me, but the mystery was cleared up a few days ago."

"A girl of thirteen——!"

"Yes, my lady. And you will admit that a woman three months advanced in pregnancy, who means to nurse her child herself, may have fears. I could not tell you that before those gentlemen, so I said things that meant nothing," the generous woman added adroitly.

Olympe Michaud's anxiety on Geneviève Niseron's account was exceedingly small, but she went in mortal terror for her husband, and the peasants who had aroused her fears took a malicious delight in keeping them alive.

"And what opened your eyes?"

"Nothing and everything!" Olympe answered, looking full at the countess. "Poor little thing, she is as slow as a tortoise over anything that I tell her to do, and as quick as a lizard if Justin asks her for the least trifle. She quivers like a leaf at the sound of my husband's voice; her face, when she looks at him, is like the face of a saint rising up to heaven; but she does not know what love is; she does not suspect that she is in love."

"Poor child!" said the countess, unconscious that her smile and tone revealed her thoughts. Mme. Michaud smiled an answer to her young mistress' smile.

"Geneviève is glum, for instance, when Justin is out of the house; if I ask her what she is thinking about, she says that she is afraid of Monsieur Rigou—all rubbish! She thinks that every one is after her—and she as black as the chimney flue! When Justin is making his round of a night in the woods, the child is every bit as nervous as I am. If I open the window when I hear my husband's horse coming I can see a light in her room, which shows that La Péchina (as they call her) is sitting up, waiting for him to come in. Like me, she does not go to bed till he comes home."

"Thirteen years old!" said the countess; "unfortunate girl——"

"Unfortunate?" echoed Olympe. "Oh! no. Her child's passion will save her."

"From what?"

"From the fate of almost every girl of her age hereabout. She is not so plain-looking now since I have polished her up, and there is something uncommon about her, something wild, that men find taking. She has altered so much that you would not know her, my lady. There is Nicolas, the son of that abominable man at the Grand-I-Vert, and one of the worst rogues in the place; he bears the child a grudge and hunts her like game. You could scarcely believe that a rich

man like Monsieur Rigou, who changes his servant every three years, could persecute an ugly little girl of twelve, but it really seems as if Nicolas Tonsard was after La Péchina; Justin told me as much. It would be a shocking thing, for the people here live just like beasts, but Justin and the two servants and I watch over the child; so be easy, my lady; she never goes out except in broad daylight, and then she only goes from here to the Conches gate. If by chance she should fall into a trap, her feeling for Justin would give her strength and will to resist, as a woman who cares about another can resist a man she detests."

"I came here on her account," said the lady; "I had no idea how much the visit was needed for your sake, for she will not always be thirteen. The child will grow handsomer."

"Oh! I am quite sure of Justin, my lady," Olympe said, smiling. "What a man! what a heart! If you only knew how deep his gratitude is to the general, to whom (he says) he owes his happiness! He is only too devoted; he would risk his life as if he were in the army still; he forgets that he may be a father."

"Well," said the countess, with a glance that brought the color into Olympe's face, "I was sorry to lose you; but now that I see your happiness I have no regrets left. How sublime and noble married love is!" she added, thinking aloud the thought which she had not dared to utter in the good abbé's presence. Virginie de Troisville stood lost in musings, and Olympe Michaud respected her mistress' mood.

"Let us see," the countess said, speaking like one who awakes from a dream. "Is this little one honest?"

"As honest as I am myself, my lady."

"Discreet?"

"As a tomb."

"Has she a grateful nature?"

"Oh, my lady, she has fits of humility, signs of an angelic nature, she comes and kisses my hands and says things that

would amaze you. 'Is it possible to die of love?' she asked me the day before yesterday. 'What makes you ask me that?' said I. 'I wanted to know if it was a disease.'"

"Did she say that?" exclaimed the countess.

"If I could remember all that she says, I could tell you much stranger things than that," said Olympe. "It looks as if she knows more about it than I do."

"Do you think, my dear, that she might take your place? for I cannot do without an Olympe," said the countess, with something like sadness in her smile.

"Not yet, my lady, she is too young; in two years' time she might. Then, if she must go away, I will let you know. She must be trained first; she knows nothing of the world. Geneviève's grandfather, old Niseron, is one of those men who would have his throat cut sooner than tell a lie; he would die of hunger sooner than touch anything intrusted to him. He holds to his opinions, and his granddaughter has been brought up in the same way of thinking. La Péchina would think herself your equal, for the good man has made a Republican of her, as he puts it; just as old Fourchon has made a vagabond of Mouche. I myself laugh at these flights, but you might be annoyed by them. She would worship you for your kindness, but she would not look up to you as above her in station. How can it be helped? She is as wild as a swallow. The mother, too, counts for something in all this."

"Then who was the mother?"

"Do you not know the story, my lady? Oh, well, old Niseron, the sacristan at Blangy, had a son, a fine strapping young fellow he was, they say, and he was drawn by the great requisition. Young Niseron was still only a gunner in 1809, in a regiment stationed in the heart of Illyria and Dalmatia. Then there came orders to march at once through Hungary to cut off the retreat of the Austrians if the Emperor should win the battle of Wagram. Michaud was in Dalmatia, and he told me all about it. While they were at Zahara, young Nise-

ron, being a very handsome young fellow, won the heart of a Montenegrin girl from the hills, who looked not unkindly on the French garrison. After they left the place the girl found it impossible to stay in it, she had lowered herself so much in her people's eyes; so Zéna Kropoli—'the Frenchwoman,' as they scornfully called her—followed the regiment. After the peace she came to France. Auguste Niseron now asked for leave to marry the Montenegrin a little while before Geneviève was born, but the poor thing died at Vincennes shortly after the birth of the child in January, 1810. The papers which you must have, if a marriage is to be valid, came a few days too late, so Auguste Niseron wrote to ask his father to come for the child, to bring a wet-nurse with him, and to take charge of it; and it was very well he did so, for he was killed soon after by a shell at Montereau. The child was baptized Geneviève at Soulanges. Mademoiselle Laguerre was much touched by the case and took an interest in the child; it seems as if it were decreed that Geneviève should be adopted by the gentry at the Aigues. Time was when Niseron had all the baby-clothes from the castle, and he was helped with money too."

The countess and Olympe, standing by the window, saw Michaud come up to Blondet and the Abbé Brossette, who were chatting as they walked up and down in the sanded semi-circular space which corresponded to the crescent outside the park palings.

"Where can she be?" asked the lady; "you have made me extremely curious to see her."

"She has gone to take the milk to Mademoiselle Gaillard at the Conches gate. She cannot be far away, for she has been gone for more than an hour."

"Oh, well, I will go to meet her with these gentlemen," said Mme. de Montcornet, and she went downstairs. She was just opening her sunshade when Michaud came up to tell her that her husband would probably be away for two days.

"Monsieur Michaud," the countess began quickly, "tell me the plain truth. Something serious is afoot. Your wife is nervous; and really, if the place is full of such people as old Fourchon, no one could live in it——"

"If it were like that we should not be on our legs, my lady," said Michaud, laughing, "for it would be very easy to get rid of us keepers. The peasants call out, that is all. But as for proceeding from squalling to acting, from petty theft to crime, they set too much store on their own lives and the open air for that. Olympe must have been repeating some gossip that frightened her—but a dream would frighten her just now," he added, taking his wife's arm and laying it on his own in a way that bade her say no more of her fears.

"Cornevin! Juliette!" called Mme. Michaud. The old servant's face soon appeared at the window. "I am going out for a minute or two. Look after the house."

Two huge dogs began to bark; evidently the lodge by the Avonne gate was not ill garrisoned. The barking of the dogs brought out Cornevin from behind the wall—Cornevin, a Percheron and Olympe's foster-father, with a face such as Perche alone can produce. Cornevin must surely have been a Chouan in '94 and '99.

The whole party went with the countess along that one of the six graveled ways which went by the side of the Silver Spring toward the Conches gate. Mme. de Montcornet and Blondet walked ahead of the others. The curé, the head-forester, and Olympe talked with lowered voices over this revelation which had been made to the lady.

"Perhaps it is all for the best," concluded the curé, "for if Madame de Montcornet chooses we may work a change in these people by kindness and gentleness."

They had come about a couple of hundred yards from the lodge by this time, and had passed the point where the stream flowed in, when the countess saw the broken shards of a red earthen pitcher on the path; milk had been spilt.

"What has happened to the child?" she asked, calling to Michaud and his wife, who had turned back.

"The same little mishap that befell the milkmaid in the fable," said Blondet.

"No," said the abbé, looking about him, "some one sprang out upon the poor child and chased her."

"Yes. Those are certainly La Péchina's footprints," said Michaud. The footmarks turned so sharply that evidently the whole thing had happened suddenly. The little girl, in her terror, must have made a dash for the lodge and tried to reach home.

The whole party followed the track pointed out by the forester, and saw that the footmarks came to an abrupt end in the middle of the path, about a hundred paces from the broken pitcher.

"There she turned off toward the Avonne," said Michaud. "Perhaps some one cut off her retreat."

"Why, she has been away for more than an hour!" cried Mme. Michaud.

The same dismay was visible in all faces. The curé hurried toward the lodge, looking along the path; and Michaud, with the same idea in his mind, went in the other direction toward Conches.

"Good heavens! she had a fall here," said Michaud, returning from the point where the footprints ceased in the direction of the Silver Spring to the other point, where they came to an end in the middle of the path. "Look here!" He pointed to a spot where every one saw at once the marks of a headlong fall.

"Those footprints that point toward the woods are marks of stocking-soles," said the curé.

"Of a woman's foot," said the countess.

"But down there, where the pitcher was broken, there are a man's footprints," added Michaud.

"There is only one set of footmarks that I can see," said

the curé, who had returned from following the woman's track as far as the wood.

"Some one had caught her up and carried her off into the wood!" cried Michaud.

"If the footmarks are made by a woman the thing is inexplicable," added Blondet.

"That abominable Nicolas must have been at his games," said Michaud; "he has been lying in wait for La Péchina for several days past. I waited for two hours this morning under the Avonne bridge to catch my gentleman; perhaps he has got some woman to help him."

"It is shocking!" cried the countess.

"They look upon it as a joke," said the curé, half sadly, half bitterly.

"Oh, La Péchina would not let them hold her!" said Michaud, "she is just the one to swim the Avonne. I will go and look along the river. Olympe, dear, you must go home. And perhaps you, gentlemen, will go with my lady along the way to Conches."

"O what a neighborhood!" said the countess.

"There are blackguards everywhere," Blondet suggested.

"Monsieur le Curé, is it true that my interference saved this child from old Rigou's clutches?" asked Mme. de Montcornet.

"Any girl under the age of fifteen whom you take to the castle will be rescued from that monster," said the Abbé Brossette. "When the apostate tried to get hold of the child, he meant to slake his thirst for vengeance as well as his licentious desires. When I took old Niseron as sacristan, I made him understand what Rigou meant; Rigou used to talk of making reparation for the injuries done him by his uncle, Monsieur Niseron, my predecessor. The ex-mayor bore me a grudge for that, and it swelled his hate. Old Niseron gave Rigou solemn warning that if any harm came to Geneviève, he would kill him, and that he held Rigou responsible for any attempt

upon the child. I should not be very far wrong if I saw some infernal plot of his in Nicolas Tonsard's behavior. He thinks he can do as he likes here."

"But is he not afraid of the law?" asked Blondet.

"In the first place, Rigou is the public prosecutor's father-in-law," the curé began. There was a pause; then he went on. "You would not imagine how utterly indifferent the divisional police and the criminal department are here with regard to such things. So long as the peasants refrain from arson and murder, so long as they pay the taxes and do not poison people, they may do as they please among themselves, and as they have not a vestige of religious principle, the state of things is shocking. On the other side of the valley there are helpless old men, past work, who are afraid to stay in their homes lest they should be starved to death; they are out in the fields as long as their legs will carry them; they know that if they once take to their beds they will die—of sheer hunger. Monsieur Sarcus, the justice of the peace, says that if all criminals were brought to justice, the government would be bankrupt through expenses of prosecution."

"Well, there is a magistrate who sees things as they are!" exclaimed Blondet.

"Ah, his lordship the bishop knew quite well how things were in this valley, and more especially in this commune," the curé continued. "Religion is the only remedy for such evils; legislation seems to me to be powerless, restricted as it is——"

The curé was interrupted by shrieks from the wood. Émile Blondet and the abbé, followed by the countess, plunged boldly in the direction from which the cries came.

XI.

THE OARISTYS, THE EIGHTEENTH ECLOGUE OF THEOCRITUS, LITTLE APPRECIATED IN A COURT OF ASSIZE.

Something of the sagacity of the savage, developed in Michaud by his new calling, together with a newly acquired knowledge of the state of feeling and affairs in the commune of Blangy, had just explained, in part, a third Idyl, modeled on the Greek. Impecunious swains like Nicolas Tonsard and well-to-do seniors of the stamp of old Rigou make liberal translations of such Idyls (in school phrase) for the use of remote country districts.

Nicolas, Tonsard's second son, had drawn an unlucky number in the last conscription. Two years previously, thanks to the united efforts of Soudry, Gaubertin, and Money-Sarcus, Nicolas' older brother had been pronounced unfit for military service, on account of some imaginary affection of the muscles of the right arm. Jean-Louis' subsequent dexterity in handling the heaviest implements of husbandry had been much remarked, and had caused some talk in the district.

So Soudry, Rigou, and Gaubertin, who watched over the family, warned Tonsard that Nicolas, a big, tall fellow, must not attempt to evade the law of conscription. At the same time, however, both the worthy mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes and Rigou had so lively a sense of the necessity of keeping on good terms with a bold man who might be a useful engine if properly directed against the Aigues, that Rigou held out some hope to the Tonsards, father and son.

Catherine, that devoted sister, paid the unfrocked monk an occasional visit, and was advised to apply to the general and the countess.

"He maybe would not be sorry to do it to make things sweet, and anyway it would be so much got out of the

enemy," said the public prosecutor's terrible father-in-law to Catherine, demanding counsel. "If the Upholsterer refuses —well, we shall see."

In Rigou's forecasts the general's refusal was one more wrong to swell the account of injuries done to the peasants by the great landowner, as well as a fresh cause for gratitude to bind Tonsard to the coalition if the ex-mayor's crafty brain should hit upon some way of liberating Nicolas.

Nicolas, bound to present himself for medical examination in a few days' time, founded little hope on the general's influence, for the Aigues had several grievances against the Tonsards. Nicolas' passion, or, more properly speaking, his fancy or whim, for La Péchina was so heated by the notion of an approaching departure which left him no time to carry out his projects concerning her that he determined to try violence.

The contempt that the child showed her persecutor, together with her energetic resistance, had kindled in the Lovelace of the Grand-I-Vert a fury of hate that equaled his frenzy of desire. For three days he had lain in wait for La Péchina, and she, poor child, knew of this. Between the girl and Nicolas there was the same mutual recognition that there is between the sportsman and the game. La Péchina could not go beyond the great iron gates, but Nicolas would show his face in one of the paths under the park walls, or he was waiting about on the bridge over the Avonne. She could soon have put herself beyond reach of this hateful persecution by speaking to her grandfather, but a strange fear, perhaps a natural instinct, leads even the simplest-natured girls to shrink from confiding in their natural protectors in matters of this kind.

Geneviève, moreover, had heard old Niseron solemnly swear that he would kill any man whatsoever who should dare (his own expression) "to lay a finger on her." (The old man imagined that the white aureola of his own seventy blameless years of life would be a protection to his little granddaughter.) The prospect of a tragedy positively appalling to a girl's lively

imagination is quite sufficient to seal her lips; there is no need to explore the recesses of her heart for a multiplication of curious reasons for her silence.

The cow at the Conches gate had calved, and Mme. Michaud was daily sending milk to Gaillard's daughter. Before La Péchina set out on this errand, she always made a survey like a cat about to venture forth from the house. She saw no sign of Nicolas; she "listened to the silence," as the poet says, and, hearing nothing, thought that the scoundrel must have gone to his work. The peasants had begun to cut their rye; they always finish their own little patches early, so as to be ready to earn the extra wages paid to harvesters. But Nicolas was not the man to make much ado over the loss of a couple of days' wages, and he was the less likely to grudge them just now because he was going away after the Soulanges fair, and to "go for a soldier" means the beginning of a new life for the peasant.

But when La Péchina, with her pitcher on her head, had come half-way, Nicolas scrambled like a wildcat down the elm-tree, where he lay in hiding among the leaves, und dropped like a thunderbolt at her feet. La Péchina flung away her pitcher, and trusted to her speed to reach the lodge. But Catherine, lying in ambush a hundred paces away, sprang out of the wood and ran up against the little girl with such force that La Péchina fell over. Catherine picked her up still dazed with the violent shock, and carried her off into an open space among the trees where the Silver Spring bubbled up in the grass.

Catherine was tall and strong. In all respects she recalled the models selected by painters and sculptors for figures of Liberty and the ideal Republic. Her beauty, which found favor in the eyes of the youth of the valley, was of the same full-bosomed type, she had the same strong, pliant figure, the same muscular lower limbs, the plump arms, the eyes that gleamed with a spark of fire, the proud expression, the hair

grasped and twisted in thick handfuls, the masculine forehead, the red mouth, the lips that curled back with a smile that had something almost ferocious in it—such a smile as Delacroix and David (of Angers) caught and rendered to admiration. A glowing brunette, the image of the people, the flames of insurrection seemed to leap forth from her clear tawny eyes; there was a soldierly insolence in their piercing gaze. Catherine had inherited from her father a temper so violent that every other member of the family at the tavern feared her, Tonsard excepted.

"Well, how do you feel, old girl?" she asked of La Péchina. Catherine, for her own ends, had set her victim down on a little knoll beside the spring, and had brought her to her senses by splashing cold water in her face.

"Where am I?" asked the little girl, opening her beautiful dark eyes. It was as if a ray of sunlight shone from them.

"Ah! if it hadn't been for me, you would be dead by now," returned Catherine.

"Thank you," said the child, still quite dizzy with her fall. "What can have happened to me?"

"You stumbled over a tree-root, and down you went as if a bullet had struck you. Oh! didn't you run, too! You bolted away like a mad thing!"

"It was your brother's fault, he caused the accident," said La Péchina, recollecting the sight of Nicolas.

"My brother? I did not see him," said Catherine. "Poor Nicolas, what may he have done that you are as frightened of him as if he were a bogey? Isn't he better-looking than your Monsieur Michaud?"

"Oh!" said La Péchina disdainfully.

"Come, child, you are laying up trouble for yourself by being so fond of those who persecute us! Why are you not on our side?"

"Why do you never set foot in a church? And why do you steal night and day?" the younger girl inquired.

"So you believe what the masters tell you, do you?" retorted Catherine scornfully, and without suspicion of La Péchina's attachment. "The bourgeois are fond of us, as they are fond of their food; they must have a plateful of something new every day. Where may you have seen the bourgeois that would marry one of us peasant girls? Just you see whether Money-Sarcus will allow his son to marry pretty Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre, though her father is a rich man and a cabinet-maker! You have never been to the 'Tivoli' at Soulanges, Socquard's place. You ought to come. You would see the bourgeois, there, that you would! Then you would begin to see that they are hardly worth the money that we make out of them when we get hold of them. Just you come to the fair this year."

"People say that the fair at Soulanges is very fine!" La Péchina cried childishly.

"I will just tell you what it is in two words," Catherine went on. "If you are pretty, they make eyes at you. What is the good of being as pretty as you are if it is not to have the men admire you? Oh! the first time I heard some one say, 'What a fine girl!' the blood in my veins turned to fire. That was at Socquard's, when the dancing was in full swing; grandfather was playing the clarionet, and he smiled, and I thought the 'Tivoli' as big and as fine as heaven. Why, child, it is all lighted up with argand lamps and looking-glasses; you might think you were in paradise. And all the gentlemen from Soulanges and Auxerre and Ville-aux-Fayes are there. Ever since that night I have loved the place where those words sounded in my ears like military music. You would bargain away your eternity to hear that said of you, child, by the man you have a liking for!"

"Why, yes; perhaps," said La Péchina dreamily.

"Just come and hear that benediction from a man's lips; you are sure to have it!" cried Catherine. "Lord, a girl as smart as you are stands a good chance of making a fine

match! There is Monsieur Lupin's son, Amaury, he has coats with gold buttons all down them; he would be very likely to ask for you in marriage! And that is not all, by any means! If you but knew what a cure for care they keep there! Look here—Socquard's spiced wine would make you forget the biggest troubles. Only imagine it, it puts fancies into your head, you feel lighter! You have never drunk spiced wine, have you? Oh, well then, you do not know what life is!"

The grown-up person's privilege of moistening the throat now and again with a glass of spiced wine excites the curiosity of a child under twelve to such a pitch that Geneviève once had put to her lips a glass that the doctor ordered for her grandfather when the old man was ill. That experiment, and a sort of magical memory which it had left in the poor child's mind, may explain the attentive hearing which she gave to Catherine. That wicked creature had counted upon making an impression, to carry out in full a plan which so far had met with success. Doubtless she meant that her victim, half-stunned by her fall, should reach a stage of mental intoxication particularly dangerous for a country girl whose seldom-stirred imagination is so much the more ardent when once heated. The spiced wine, kept in reserve, was to complete the task of turning the victim's head.

"Then what is there in it?" asked La Péchina.

"All sorts of things!" said Catherine, glancing sideways to see whether her brother was coming. "Thing-um-bobs from the Indies, to begin with, cinnamon and herbs that change you by enchantment. In fact, you feel as if you have everything you want. It makes you happy! You do not care a straw for anything."

"I should be afraid to drink spiced wine while I was dancing!" put in La Péchina.

"Afraid of what?" asked Catherine. "There is not the least thing to be afraid of. Just remember what a lot of

people there are about. And all the bourgeois looking on at us! Ah! one day of that kind will help you to bear up against lots of troubles. See it and die, one would be quite content."

"If only Monsieur and Madame Michaud would come too——" began La Péchina, her eyes on fire with excitement and desire.

"Why, there is your Grandfather Niseron, you haven't given him up, have you? Poor dear man, he would feel flattered to see you queening it! Do you really like those *arminacs* (nickname for Parisians), Michaud and the rest of of them, better than your grandfather and us Burgundians? It is not nice to forsake your own kith and kin. And then, beside, what could the Michauds say if your grandfather were to take you to the fair at Soulanges? Oh! if you only knew what it is to reign over a man, to have him wild about you, to be able to tell him to 'Go there!' as I tell Godain, and he goes, or 'Do this!' and he does it! And rigged out as you are, child, you see, you would completely turn some gentleman's head; Monsieur Lupin's son, for instance. To think that Monsieur Amaury is sweet upon Marie, my sister, because she has fair hair; and he is afraid of me, as you may say. But as for you, now that those people at the lodge have smartened you up, you look like an empress."

While Catherine cleverly turned the girl's thoughts away from Nicolas, the better to dispel suspicion in that simple mind, she cunningly instilled the nectar of flattery. Unwittingly she had found the weak spot in her victim's heart. La Péchina, though neither more nor less than a poor peasant girl, was an appalling instance of precocious development, like many a nature destined to end even as they blossom, prematurely. She was a strange freak, produced by crossing the Montenegrin and Burgundian strains, begotten and born amid the turmoil of war, and all these circumstances had doubtless gone to the moulding of her. Thin, slender, and

brown as a tobacco-leaf, she possessed incredible physical strength; but her low height was deceptive to the eyes of peasants who know nothing of the mysteries of the nervous system. Nerves do not come within the ken of rural pathology.

Geneviève at thirteen was scarcely as tall as other girls of her age, but she had come to her full height. Did she owe to her extraction, or to the sun of Burgundy, the dusky but glowing topaz-tint of her face? the glow of the blood through the dusky transparent tissues, a color that adds years to a girl's apparent age? Medical science would perhaps decline to decide. The premature age of La Péchina's features was atoned for by the brightness—the splendid blaze of light—in the eyes that shone like two stars. Perhaps it is because such eyes are so full of sunlight that they are always shaded by long thick lashes; hers were almost exaggerated in length.

Thick tresses of blue-black hair, fine and long and abundant, rose above a forehead carved like the brows of an antique Juno, but the splendid crown of hair, the great dark eyes, the goddess' brow, eclipsed the lower part of the face. The upper part of the nose was regular in shape and slightly aquiline, but below it terminated in blunted nostrils, with something equine about them. In moments of vehement excitement they turn up, a trick of facial expression that gave her a look of fierce frenzy. Like the nose, the rest of the face seemed to have been left unfinished; it was as if clay had been wanting to the hand of the Great Sculptor. The space beneath the mouth was so narrow that any one who should take La Péchina by the chin must have touched her lips; but her teeth diverted attention from this defect. You could almost have credited each one of those little, glistening, enameled, shapely-cut, translucent bones with intelligent life, and a mouth somewhat too wide made it easy to see them. This last defect was further emphasized by the sinuous curving

lines of lips, that bore a resemblance to the fantastic branchings of coral.

The shell-like convolutions of her ears were so translucent that they turned to a rose-red in the light. Sunburned though she was, the skin revealed the marvelous fineness of the tissues beneath. If love lies in the sense of touch, as Buffon avers, such a silken skin must have been as subtle and as penetrating as the scent of daturas. Her chest, indeed her whole body, was appallingly thin, but the little hands and feet were bewitchingly small, a sign of unusual nervous power and of an organization capable of endurance.

A fierce pride blended these diabolical imperfections and divine beauties into harmony, in spite of discords; the undaunted spirit housed in the feeble body looked forth from her eyes. Once having seen the child, it was impossible to forget her. Nature had meant to fashion a woman, but the circumstances of conception had given her a boy's face and figure. At sight of the strange girl, a poet would have given her Yemen for her native land and Arabian afrides and genii for her kin. Nor was La Péchina's outward appearance misleading. She had a spirit that matched her eyes of fire, the quick wit suggested by the lips set with the brilliants of bewitching teeth; she had thoughts that fitted her queenly brow, the equine fury of the nostrils that seemed ready to neigh at any moment. Love, as it springs into being amid burning sands and in the deserts, shook the pulses of the heart of twenty years in the thirteen-year-old Montenegrin girl; it was with her as with her snowy mountain ranges, summer had come upon her before the spring flowers had had time to bloom.

By this time observing minds will understand how it was that La Péchina, breathing out passion at every pore, should stir the sluggish fancies of depraved natures. At table your mouth waters at the sight of certain fruits, pitted, contorted, covered with dark specks; the gourmet knows that under

such a rind Nature has hidden her cunningest savors and perfume. Why, when every one else in the valley pitied La Péchina for an ill-grown weakling, should a clod-pate like Nicholas Tonsard have set his choice on a creature worthy of a poet? Why should Rigou, in his old age, desire her with the heat of youth? Which of these two was young or old? Was the young peasant as sated as the old money-lender? How was it that both extremes of life united in one sinister caprice? Is exhausted vigor like the first beginnings of strength? Men's vices are unfathomable depths guarded by sphinxes, and questions to which there are no answers almost always stand at the beginning and end of devious ways.

It may now be imagined how it was that the exclamation *Piccina!* broke from the countess when she first saw Geneviève by the roadside in the previous year, a child in a maze of wonder at the sight of the carriage and a lady inside it dressed like Mme. de Montcornet. And it was this girl, so nearly one of Nature's failures in the making, who now loved with all the energy of her Montenegrin nature. She loved the tall, handsome, noble-hearted forester, as children of her age can love when they love; that is to say, with a frenzy of childish desire, with all the force of their youth, with the devotion which sows the seeds of divine romance in a virgin soil. Catherine's coarse hand had smitten the most responsive strings of a harp strained to breaking. To dance under Michaud's eyes! To go to the saloon at Soulanges! To engrave herself upon the memory of this idolized master! What thoughts were these to drop into that volcanic brain? What was this but to fling live coals upon straw lying out in the August sun?

"No, Catherine," said La Péchina. "No, I am an ugly, puny thing. I shall have to sit in a corner and be an old maid all alone in the world; that is my fate."

"Men like peaked-looking girls," Catherine declared. "Look here at me!" she went on, holding out both arms.

"There is Godain, a regular shrimp, has taken a fancy to me; so has that little fellow Charles that goes about with the count. But young Lupin is shy of me. I tell you again, it is the little men that fall in love with me and say, 'What a fine girl!' at Ville-aux-Fayes or Soulanges. Now, all the tall, fine-looking men will fall in love with you."

"Oh, Catherine, *really?* is that true?" cried La Péchina in an ecstasy.

"Why, it is as true as this, that Nicolas, the finest fellow in the neighborhood, is over head and ears in love with you. He dreams of you, and gets low about you, and all the girls in the place are in love with him. He is a mettled lad! If you put on a white frock and yellow ribbons, you will be the handsomest girl in the room at Socquard's, at the feast of Our Lady, when all the grand folk of Ville-aux-Fayes are there! Look here, will you come? Wait a bit, I was cutting grass yonder for our cows. I have a drop of spiced wine in my gourd; Socquard gave it me this morning," she went on, seeing in La Péchina's eyes the excited look that every woman understands. "I am a good-natured one, we will go shares at it. You will fancy that some one is in love with you."

As they talked Nicolas came stealing toward them, picking out patches of thick grass to step upon, creeping noiselessly till he reached the trunk of a huge oak-tree near the place where his sister had deposited La Péchina. Catherine's eyes, always looking about her, lighted at last on Nicolas as she went for the spiced wine.

"There! you take the first pull," said she, passing the liqueur over to La Péchina.

"It burns!" exclaimed Geneviève, handing back the gourd after a couple of sips.

"There, you silly!" retorted Catherine, as she emptied the rustic flask, "that is the way! It is as if a ray of sunlight shone in your inside."

"And here am I that ought to have taken the milk to Mlle. Gaillard!" cried La Péchina. "Nicolas scared me——"

"So you don't like Nicolas?"

"No, I don't," answered La Péchina. "What makes him hunt me about? There are plenty of creatures that would be glad of him."

"But suppose that he likes you better than any one else in the valley, child——"

"I am sorry for him," said La Péchina.

"It is plain that you do not know him," returned the older girl.

The ominous words were hardly uttered before Catherine Tonsard sprang upon La Péchina, caught her by the waist, flung her flat upon the grass and held her down, so that she had no power to extricate herself from her perilous position. At the sight of her loathed persecutor, Geneviève shrieked with all her might, and directed a kick in the stomach at Nicolas which sent him reeling five paces back; then, like an acrobat, she wriggled round so deftly that she defeated Catherine's calculations and got up to run away. But Catherine, still on the ground, reached out an arm and clutched her by the foot, and La Péchina fell heavily headlong forward. This ugly fall put a stop to the brave girl's incessant cries. Nicolas, who had recovered himself in spite of the violence of the blow, came up in a towering rage and tried to seize his victim. The child's head was heavy with the wine, but in this strait she caught Nicolas by the throat and held him in an iron grip.

"She is choking me!—— Catherine! help!" cried Nicolas, with difficulty making his voice audible.

La Péchina shrieked aloud. Catherine tried to stop the sounds by putting a hand over her mouth, but the child bit her till the blood came. At that very moment Blondet and the countess and the curé appeared on the outskirts of the wood.

"Here come the gentry from the Aigues," said Catherine, helping Geneviève to rise.

"Do you want to live?" said Nicolas Tonsard hoarsely.

"And if I do?" said La Péchina.

"Tell them that we were romping and I will forgive you," said Nicolas with a scowl.

"Are you going to say that, you cat?" insisted Catherine, with a glance more teriffic than Nicolas' murderous threat.

"Yes, if you will let me alone," said La Péchina. "Anyhow I shall not go out again without my scissors."

"You hold your tongue or I will chuck you into the Avonne," said Catherine savagely.

"You are wretches!" cried the curé. "You deserve to be arrested and sent up for trial for this."

"Oh, as to that, what do some of you do in your drawing-rooms?" asked Nicolas, staring at the countess and Blondet, who quailed. "You play there, don't you? All right, the fields are our playground, and you cannot always be at work; we were playing. You ask my sister and La Péchina."

"What can you do when it comes to blows if this is the way you play?" exclaimed Blondet.

Nicolas looked at Blondet with a deadly hate in his eyes.

"Speak up!" said Catherine, taking La Péchina by the fore-arm and gripping it till she left a blue bracelet of bruises round it. "We were having a game, weren't we?——"

"Yes, my lady, we were having a game," said La Péchina. The child's whole strength was exhausted; she stood limp and drooping as if she were about to faint.

"You hear that, my lady," said Catherine brazenly, with a glance that between woman and woman is like a stab.

She took her brother's arm and the pair walked off together. They knew quite well what ideas they had given the three personages behind them. Twice Nicolas looked round; twice he encountered Blondet's eyes. The literary man was scanning the tall, broad-shouldered rascal. Nicolas stood

five feet eight inches high; he had crisp black hair, a high color, his face was good-tempered enough, but there were significant lines about the lips and mouth that suggested the cruelty peculiar to lust and idleness. Catherine swayed her white-and-blue-striped skirts as she went with a sort of vicious coquetry.

"Cain and his wife," said Blondet, turning to the curé.

"You do not know how well your words have hit the mark," returned the Abbé Brossette.

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé, what will they do to me?" cried La Péchina, as soon as the brother and sister were out of earshot.

The countess' face was as white as her handkerchief. The whole thing had been a great shock to her, so great that she heard neither La Péchina, nor the curé, nor Blondet.

"This would drive one from an earthly paradise," she said at last; "but, of all things, let us save this little one from their clutches."

"You were right," Blondet said in a low voice meant only for the countess. "The child is a whole romance—a romance in flesh and blood."

The Montenegrin girl had reached a point when body and soul seem to smoke with the unquenched fires of wrath which have put the utmost strain on every faculty, physical and mental.

There is an inexpressible and supreme human splendor which only breaks forth under the pressure of some high-wrought mood of struggle or of victory, of love or martyrdom. She had left home that morning in a frock of a material of narrow brown-and-yellow stripes, with a little frill at the throat that she had risen early to pleat into her dress; and now she stood as yet unconscious of the disorder of her earth-stained garments or her torn frill. Her hair strayed down over her face, she felt for her comb; but with that first dawn of dismay Michaud appeared upon the scene; he also

had heard the cries. All La Péchina's energy returned at once at the sight of her god.

"He did not so much as lay a finger on me, Monsieur Michaud!"

That cry and its accompanying glance and gesture, which spoke more eloquently than the words, told Blondet and the curé in one moment more than Mme. Michaud had told the countess of the strange girl's passion for the head-forester, who was blind to it.

"The wretch!" exclaimed Michaud; and, acting on an impulse of impotent wrath which takes the fool and the wise alike at unawares, he shook his fist in the direction of Nicolas, whose tall figure darkened the wood-path into which he had plunged with his sister.

"Then you were not playing after all," commented the Abbé Brossette, with a keen glance at La Péchina.

"Do not tease her," said the countess. "Let us go home at once."

La Péchina, spent though she was, drew from the force of her passion sufficient strength to walk—under the eyes of her adored master. The countess followed immediately behind Michaud, along a footpath known only to keepers and poachers, and so narrow that two could not walk abreast in it. It was a short cut to the Avonne gate.

"Michaud," the lady began, when they had come half-way through the wood, "the neighborhood must be rid somehow or other of this good-for-nothing scamp. This child is perhaps in danger of her life."

"To begin," returned Michaud, "Geneviève shall never leave the lodge. My wife shall take Vatel's nephew into the house; he keeps the walks in order in the park. We will replace him by a young fellow who comes from near my wife's home, for after this we ought to have no one about the Aigues whom we cannot trust. With Gounod in the house and Cornevin, Olympe's old foster-father, the cows will be well

looked after, and La Péchina shall never go out by herself again."

"I shall ask the count to make good the extra expense to you," said the lady; "but this will not rid us of Nicolas. How can it be done?"

"Oh, that is quite simple; there is a way ready made. Nicolas will have to go before the examining committee directly. Instead of interfering to get him off, as the Tonsards expect the general to do, he has only to give the authorities a hint——"

"I will go myself if need be to see my Cousin Castéran at the prefecture," said the countess, "but meanwhile, I am afraid——"

These few words were exchanged at the point where several paths met in a circle. The countess climbed the bank by the ditch-side, and, in spite of herself, a cry broke from her. Michaud went to her assistance, thinking that she had received a scratch from a bit of dead thorn, but he too shuddered at the sight that met his eyes.

Marie and Bonnébault, sitting on the bank-side, were apparently chatting together; but evidently the pair had hidden themselves for purposes of eavesdropping. They had heard people come up in the forest, had recognized the voices of the gentry, and left their sentinel's post.

Bonnébault, a thin lanky youth, had served six years in a cavalry regiment. Some few months ago he had been discharged for good from the army for bad conduct; he was enough to spoil the best of regiments; and since then he had been hanging about Conches. With a pair of mustaches, a tuft of beard on the chin, a certain presence and carriage that a soldier learns in barracks and drill, he had turned the heads of all the peasant girls in the valley. Bonnébault wore his hair, soldier fashion, clipped close to the back of the head, frizzed about the face, and brushed up jauntily behind on the temples. He tilted his foraging cap knowingly over one ear.

Indeed, compared with peasants in rags and tatters like Mouche and Fourchon, he was a glorious creature in his linen trousers, leather boots, and short jacket. This attire, assumed since his discharge, smacked somewhat of half-pay and a countryman's life; but the cock of the valley had better clothes for high days and holidays. He lived, it may be said at once, on his sweethearts, and found his means barely sufficient for his amusements, potations, and various methods of going to the devil, a necessary consequence of hanging about the Café of Peace.

There was something indescribably sinister in the rascal's round, featureless countenance, though at first sight he looked not unpleasing. He was cross-eyed; that is, he did not exactly squint, but his eyes sometimes "went different ways," to borrow a phrase from the studio, and this optical defect, slight though it was, gave him an underhand expression which made you feel uncomfortable; and the more so because a twitch of the forehead and eyebrows accompanied these movements of the eyes—a revelation of a certain inherent baseness and an innate tendency to go to the bad.

Of cowardice, as of courage, there be many kinds. Bonnébault, who would have fought on the field with the bravest, was pusillanimous before his vices and unable to resist his fancies. He was as lazy as a lizard, though he could be active enough when he chose; he had no sense of shame, he was proud and yet base, and the man who could do anything and did nothing, the "breaker of heads and hearts," to use a soldier's phrase, found his sole delight in mischief and worse. A character of this kind is as dangerous an example in a quiet country place as in a regiment.

Bonnébault's aim, like Tonsard's and Fourchon's, was to live in comfort and to do nothing; and to that end he had "laid himself out," as Vermichel and Fourchon would say. By exploiting his figure, with increasing success, and his skill at billiards, with varying fortune, he flattered himself that in

his quality of prop and pillar of the Café of Peace he should one day marry Mlle. Aglaé Socquard, only daughter of the proprietor thereof. Socquard's café (making due allowance for relative position) was to Soulanges much what Ranelagh is to the Bois de Boulogne. To adopt the career of a bar-keeper, to be proprietor of a dancing-saloon—'twas a fine prospect, a very marshal's baton, for a man who hated work.

Bonnébault's habits, life, and nature were written in such foul characters on his face that the countess started at the sight of him and his companion as if she had seen a couple of snakes. It was this shock that had made her cry out.

Marie Tonsard was so infatuated with Bonnébault that for him she would have stolen outright. That mustache, that lounging military swagger, that low bully's air, went to her heart as the manners, bearing, and air of a De Marsay fascinate Parisian fair. Every social sphere has its bright particular stars. Marie was uneasy, she dismissed Amaury, the rival coxcomb of the little town. She meant to be Mme. Bonnébault.

"Halloo there! halloo! are you coming?" shouted Catherine and Nicolas in the distance; they had caught sight of the other pair.

The shrill cry rang through the woods like a savage's signal.

Michaud shuddered at the sight of the two creatures and bitterly repented his hasty speech. If Bonnébault and Marie had overheard the conversation nothing but mischief would come of it. Some such apparently infinitely trifling matter was enough in the present exasperated condition of parties to bring about a decisive result, even as upon some battlefield victory and defeat have been decided by the course of some little stream which balks the advance of the battery, though a shepherd's lad can cross it at a running jump.

Bonnébault took off his cap gallantly to the lady, took Marie's arm, and swaggered off in triumph.

"That fellow is the *Clef-des-Cœurs* (Key of Hearts) of the

valley," Michaud whispered, using a nickname of the French camp which means a Don Juan. "He is a very dangerous character. He has only to lose a score of francs at billiards and he would be ready to murder Rigou. He is as ready for a crime as for pleasure."

"I have seen more than enough for one day," said the countess, taking Émile's arm. "Let us turn back."

She watched La Péchina go into the house, and made Mme. Michaud a sad farewell sigh; Olympe's dejection had infected the countess.

"What is this, madame?" said the Abbé Brossette. "Do the difficulties of doing good here really turn you away from making the attempt? For five years I have slept on a mattress and lived in a bare unfurnished parsonage-house, saying mass without a flock to listen to it, preaching to an empty church, officiating without fees or supplementary stipend; I have the State allowance of six hundred francs; I give away one-third of it, and have asked nothing of his lordship the bishop—and after all I do not despair. If you but knew what it is like in the winter here you would feel all the force of those words. I have nothing to warm me but the thought of saving this valley and winning it back to God. It is not a question of ourselves alone, madame; the future time is concerned. If we curés are put here to say to the poor, 'Know how to be poor!' that is to say, 'Bear your lot in patience and work,' it is no less our duty to bid the wealthy 'Know how to be rich,' which means, 'Be intelligently beneficent, fear God, be worthy of the post He has assigned to you!'

"Well, madame, you are only depositaries of wealth and the power that wealth gives; if you fail to fulfill your trust you will not transmit that which you received to your children. Your are robbing those that shall come after you! If you follow in the selfish ways of the *cantatrice*, whose supineness most surely caused the evils which have startled you by their

extent, you will see yet again the scaffolds on which your predecessors died for the sins of their fathers. To do good obscurely in some out-of-the-way nook, just as this Rigou, for example, is doing harm—— Ah! God in heaven delights to hear the prayer that takes the form of such deeds as these! If, in every commune, there were three human beings determined to do good, this fair France of ours would be saved from the depths toward which we are hurrying, dragged down as we are by a creed of indifference to all that does not directly concern ourselves! First of all, change your lives; change them and you will change your laws."

Although the countess was deeply moved by this outpouring of truly catholic charity, her only answer was the rich man's fatal formula, "We shall see," a put-off that contains sufficient promise in it to repel any immediate call upon the purse, while it leaves the speaker free in future to fold his arms when the mischief is done and to plead that now it is too late.

Upon this the Abbé Brossette took leave of Mme. de Montcornet, and went by the nearest way to the Blangy gate.

"Is Belshazzar's Feast to be throughout all ages the symbol of the last days of a doomed class, oligarchy, or ruling power?" he asked himself when he had made ten paces on his way. "O God, if it be Thy holy will to let loose the poor like a deluge that there may be a new world, then I can understand that Thou wouldst abandon the rich man to his blindness."

XII.

SHOWS HOW THE TAVERN IS THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT.

Meanwhile, by screaming at the top of her voice, Granny Tonsard had brought several people from Blangy, curious to know what could have happened at the Grand-I-Vert. Blangy itself was about as near to the tavern as the Blangy gate of

the park. Among those attracted thus, who should be there but old Niseron—La Péchina's grandfather, who had just rung the second Angelus, and was on his way back to train the last vine-stems on his last bit of ground.

All the honesty left in the commune had taken up its abode in the old vine-dresser, whose back was bent with toil, whose features were blanched and hair whitened with age. During the Revolution he had been the president of the Ville-aux-Fayes Jacobin Club and a sworn member of the local Revolutionary Committee. Jean-Francois Niseron was composed of the stuff of which apostles are made. In years gone by he had been the very image of Saint Peter, the saint whose portrait never varies with any painter's brush; he had the square forehead of the man of the people, the stiff crisped hair of the toiler, the proletarian's muscles, the fisherman's bronzed face, the powerful nose, the half-satirical mouth that laughs at ill-luck, and (a final characteristic) the shoulders of the strong man who will cut his faggots in the neighboring wood and cook his dinner while doctrinaires are talking about it.

This was Niseron as a man of forty at the time when the Revolution broke out, a man as hard as iron and as honest as the day. He took the side of the people, he put his faith in the Republic with the first mutterings of a word perhaps even more to be dreaded than the idea behind it. He believed in the Republic of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the brotherhood of man, the exchange of noble sentiments, the public recognition of merit, in a fair field and no favor, in a great many things, in fact, which, though quite practicable in a district no bigger than ancient Sparta, become Utopian visions when the area in question is expanded into an empire. He subscribed to his theories with his blood; his only son went to the frontier: he did more; for them he made the sacrifice of his pecuniary interests, that final immolation of self. He was the nephew and sole heir of the old curé of Blangy, who died and left all his money to pretty Arsène, his servant-girl; and though

Niseron, as a tribune, was all-powerful in the district and might have helped himself to his heritage, he respected the wishes of the dead, and accepted the poverty which came upon him as swiftly as the decadence on his Republic.

Not a groat nor a branch of a tree belonging to another passed into his hands. If this sublime Republican could have founded a school the Republic would have been accepted. He declined to buy the National lands, denying the Republic the right of confiscation. In response to the demands of the Committee of Public Safety he was determined that the manhood of the citizens should work for the holy fatherland the miracles that political jugglers tried to effect with gold coin. The man of antiquity publicly upbraided Gaubertin senior with his treacherous double-dealing, with winking at corruption, with picking and stealing. He soundly rated the virtuous Mouchon, that representative of the People, whose virtue mainly consisted in his incapacity, as was the case with plenty of his like who, strong with the might of a whole nation, with absolute command of the most enormous political resources that ever nation put at the disposition of its rulers, attained fewer great achievements with the strength of a people, than a Richelieu with the weakness of a king. For these reasons Citizen Niseron became a living reproach to everybody else, and before long the good soul was overwhelmed and buried under the avalanche of oblivion by the terrible formula, "Nothing pleases him!" a catchword in favor with those who have grown fat on sedition.

This "peasant of the Danube" returned under his own roof at Blangy. He watched his illusions vanish one by one, saw his Republic become an appendage of the Emperor, and sank into penury under the eyes of Rigou, who deliberately ruined him with hypocritical regret. Do you ask why? Jean-Francois Niseron would not take a penny of Rigou. Reiterated refusals had taught the wrongful inheritor of old Niseron's goods the depths of the scorn with which the rightful heir

regarded him. And, to crown all, the icy contempt had just been succeeded by the fearful threat as to the little granddaughter when the Abbé Brossette mentioned her to the countess.

The old man had written a history of the twelve years of the Republic. It was a history written to suit his own notions; it was full of the grandiose traits for which those heroic times will be remembered for ever. The good man shut his eyes to all the scandals, slaughter, and spoliation; he always dwelt admiringly on the self-sacrifice, the *Vengeur* (avengers), the "patriotic gifts," the enthusiasm of the people on the frontiers; he went on with his dream the better to sleep.

The Revolution made many poets like old Niseron, poets who sang their songs within our borders or in our armies, in their inmost souls, in the broad light of day, in many a deed done unseen amid the storm-clouds of those times; even as in the days of the Empire the wounded left forgotten on the field would cry "Long live the Emperor!" before they died. This sublimity is a part of the very nature of France.

The Abbé Brossette respected Niseron's harmless convictions. The old man in the simplicity of his heart had been won by a chance phrase: "The true Republic," the priest had said, "is to be found in the Gospel." And the old Republican carried the crucifix; and he wore the vestment, half-black, half-red; and he was decorous and serious in church, and he lived by the triple functions which he fulfilled, thanks to the Abbé Brossette, who tried to give the good man not a living, but enough to keep him from starving.

The old Aristides of Blangy said but little, like all noble dupes who wrap themselves round in the mantle of resignation; but he never failed to reprove evil-doing, and the peasants feared him as thieves fear the police. At the Grand-I-Vert they always made much of him, but he did not go there half-a-dozen times in a year. He would execrate the lack of

charity in the rich, their selfishness revolted him, and the peasants always took this fibre in his nature for something that he had in common with them. They used to say, "Old Niseron is no friend to the rich folk, so he is one of us;" and a noble life received by way of civic crown the comment, "Good Daddy Niseron; there is not a better man!" He was not seldom called in to settle disputes, and in person realized the magic words, "the village elder."

In spite of his dire poverty he was exceedingly tidy in person. He always wore breeches, thick striped stockings, iron-bound shoes, the coat with big buttons that once was almost a national costume, and the broad-brimmed felt hat—such as old peasants wear even now. On working days he appeared in a short blue jacket so threadbare that you could see the manner of its weaving. There was a noble something that cannot be described in his face and bearing, the pride of a man who feels that he is free and worthy of his freedom. In short, he wore clothes, and did not go about in rags.

"What has been happening out of the common, granny? I heard you from the steeple!" he remarked.

Then the old man heard the whole story of Vatel's frustrated attempt; every one spoke at once after the fashion of country folk.

"If you did not cut the tree, Vatel was in the wrong; but if you *did* cut the tree, you have done two bad things," pronounced Father Niseron.

"Just take a drop of wine!" put in Tonsard, offering a brimming glass.

"Shall we set off?" asked Vermichel, arising and looking at Brunet.

"Yes. We can do without Daddy Fourchon; we can take the deputy-mayor from Conches with us instead," said Brunet. "Go on ahead, I have a paper to leave at the castle; Daddy Rigou has gained his case, and I must give notice of judgment." And Brunet, fortified by a couple of nips of brandy,

remounted his gray mare, with a good-day to Father Niseron, for everybody in the valley looked up to the old man.

No science, nay, no practiced statistician, can obtain statistics of the more than telegraphic speed with which news spread through country districts, no account of the ways by which it crosses waste wildernesses (the standing reproach of French administrators and French capital). It is a bit of well-known contemporary history that a banker-prince rode his horses to death between the field of Waterloo and Paris (for he, needless to say, was gaining what the Emperor had lost—to wit, a kingdom), yet after all he only reached the capital a few hours ahead of the disastrous tidings. So within an hour of the time when Granny Tonsard fell out with Vatel a good many regular customers had dropped in at the Grand-I-Vert.

The first to come was Courtecuisse. You would have found it hard to recognize in him the jolly game-keeper, the fat Friar John, for whom it may be remembered his wife had boiled the coffee and milk on a certain morning not so very long back. He looked years older, he had grown thin and wan, a dreadful object-lesson to eyes that took no heed of the warning.

"He had a mind to go up higher than the ladder," so it was said when anybody pitied the ex-keeper and blamed Rigou; "he wanted to turn master."

And, indeed, when Courtecuisse bought the Bâchelerie he had meant to "turn master," and had boasted as much. His wife went out collecting manure. Before daybreak she and Courtecuisse were at work digging their richly manured garden plot, which brought in several successive crops in the year, and yet they only just managed to pay Rigou the interest due on the balance of the purchase-money. Their daughter in service at Auxerre sent her wages to her father and mother; but do what they might, and in spite of this help, the balance was now due, and they had not a copper sou.

Mme. Courtecuisse had been used to indulge now and again in a bottle of spiced wine and sugared toast. Now she drank nothing but water. Courtecuisse scarcely trusted himself inside the Grand-I-Vert lest he should be drawn into laying out three sous. He was no longer a person to be courted. He had lost his free nips at the tavern, and, like all fools, he whined about ingratitude. In fact, he was going the way of all peasants bitten with the wish to own land; he was ill-nourished, and found the work heavier and heavier as the food grew less.

"Courtecuisse has put too much in bricks and mortar," said the envious. "He should have waited till he was master before he began to plant wall-fruit."

The simpleton had made improvements, brought the three acres sold by Rigou into high cultivation, and lived in fear of being turned out! The man who once wore leather shoes and sportsmen's gaiters now went about in sabots, and dressed no better than old Fourchon. And he laid the blame of his hard life on the gentry at the Aigues! Gnawing care had made the once chubby, jovial little man so dull and sullen that he looked like a victim of slow poison or some incurable disease.

"What can be the matter with you, Monsieur Courtecuisse? Has some one cut your tongue out?" asked Tonsard, when the tale of the recent encounter had been told and the newcomer was silent.

"That would be a pity," said La Tonsard; "he has no call to complain of the midwife who cut his tongue-string; she made a good job of it."

"Thinking of ways to pay off Monsieur Rigou freezes your gab," complained the old man, grown so much older in so short a time.

"Pooh!" said Granny Tonsard. "You have a good-looking girl; she will be seventeen now; if she behaves wisely, you will easily settle with that old scribbler yonder——"

"We sent her away to old Madame Mariotte at Auxerre two years ago on purpose to keep her out of harm's way. I would sooner die than let her——"

"What a fool!" put in Tonsard. "Look at my girls: are they dead? Any one who should say that they were not as steady as stone images would have to answer for it to my gun."

"It would be very hard to have to go out of the place yonder?" cried Courtecuisse, shaking his head. "I had sooner some one paid me for shooting down one of those *arminacs!*"

"Oh, a girl would do better to save her father than to keep her virtue till it mildews," retorted Tonsard. He felt a little sharp tap on his shoulder as he spoke. It was Father Niseron.

"That was not well said," began the old man. "A father is the guardian of the honor of his family. It is just such doings that draw down contempt on us, and they say that the people are not fit to have liberty. The people ought to set the rich an example of honor and civic virtues. You all sell yourselves to Rigou for gold; every one of you! When you do not give him your daughters, you sell your own manhood! That is bad."

"Just see what Short Boots has come to?" said Tonsard.

"Just see what I have come to!" returned old Niseron. "I sleep in peace; there are no thorns in my pillow."

"Let him talk, Tonsard," said La Tonsard in her husband's ear. "You know very well that that is his crotchet, poor dear!"

Bonnébault and Marie and Catherine and her brother all came in at that moment. All four were in a bad humor over the failure of Nicolas' scheme, and Michaud's proposal overheard by them had been the last straw. So Nicolas, once under the paternal roof, broke into a frightful outburst against the Aigues and the whole Michaud establishment.

"Here is the harvest beginning! Well, now, I am not going away until I have lighted my pipe at their ricks," he shouted, bringing down his fist with a bang on the table at which he sat.

"There is no need to yelp like that before anybody and everybody," said Godain, pointing to old Niseron.

"If he were to tell tales I would wring his neck like a chicken's," put in Catherine. "He has had his day: a meddlesome old fault-finder! Virtuous they call him! It is his temperament, that is all!"

It was a strange and curious sight to see all the upturned faces of the folk gathered together in that den, while Granny Tonsard stood sentinel at the door, lest any one should overhear the talk over the liquor.

But the most alarming among all those faces belonged to Godain, Catherine's wooer; the most alarming and yet the least striking face in the tavern. Godain was a miser who lacked gold—a miser, that is, of the most pitiless kind; does not the hoardless miser take precedence of the miser who broods over his treasure? The latter looks within himself, but the other gazes into the future with a dreadful fixity. This Godain was a type which seemed to represent the most numerous class among the peasantry. Godain was short, so short that he had been exempted from military service. He was naturally thin, and toil and the dull frugality which saps the life of such insatiable workers as Courtecuisse had still further dried him up. His little meagre face was lighted by two yellow eyes, streaked with green threads and speckled with brown. The greed of gain, of gain at any price, which shone in them, was steeped in a cold-blooded sensuality; desires once hot and vehement had cooled and hardened like lava. The skin was strained tightly over the brown, mummy-like temples, the hairs of a scanty beard grew here and there among the wrinkles like wheat-stalks among the furrows. Nothing wrung sweat from Godain; he reabsorbed his substance.

The sinewy, indefatigable hands like hairy claws might have been made of old seasoned wood. He was barely seven-and-twenty, yet there were white threads already among the rusty black hair.

As to dress, he wore a blouse, which gave glimpses through the fastening of a coarse linen shirt, which to all appearance he only changed once a month, and washed himself in the Thune. His sabots were mended with scraps of old iron. It was impossible to pronounce on the original material of his trousers, for the darns and patches which covered it were infinite. Finally, he wore a shocking cap, evidently picked up on the doorstep of some tradesman's house in Ville-aux-Fayes.

Godain was clear-sighted enough to see the value of the elements of latent fortune in Catherine. He meant to succeed Tonsard at the Grand-I-Vert, and with that end in view he put forth all his cunning, all his power, to capture her. He promised her that she should be rich, he promised that she should have all the license which her mother had taken; before he had finished he had promised his future father-in-law a heavy rent for his tavern, five hundred francs a year until the place was paid for; Godain had had an interview with Brunet, and on the heads of that interview he hoped to pay in stamped paper. As a journeyman agricultural-implement maker, this gnome would work for the ploughwright when work was plentiful; but he took the highly paid overtime jobs. He had invested some eighteen hundred francs with Gaubertin, but not a soul knew of the money, and he lived like a miserably poor man, lodging in a garret in his master's house, and gleaning at harvest-time, but he carried Gaubertin's receipt about him, sewn into the band of his Sunday trousers, and saw it renewed each year; each year the amount was a little larger, swelled by his savings and the interest.

"Eh! what's that to me?" shouted Nicolas, in reply to

Godain's prudent observation. "If I am to go for a soldier, I would sooner that the sawdust drank my blood at once than give it drop by drop. And I will rid the neighborhood of one of these *arminacs* which the devil has let loose upon us." And with that he told the tale of the so-called plot which Michaud had woven against him.

"Where would you have France look for her soldiers?" the old man asked gravely. During the silence that followed on Nicolas' hideous threat he had risen and faced the young man.

"A fellow serves his time in the army and comes back again," said Bonnébault, curling his mustache.

Old Niseron saw that all the black sheep of the district had come together; he shook his head and went out, leaving a demi-sou with Mme. Tonsard to pay for his glass of wine. There was a general stir of satisfaction among those who sat drinking as soon as the good man had set foot on the steps. It would have been plain to any onlooker that they all felt constraint in the presence of this embodiment of their conscience.

"Well, now, what have *you* to say to all this, eh! Short Boots?" asked Vaudoyer, who suddenly appeared and heard the tale of Vatel's exploit from Tonsard.

Courtecuisse (short shanks) whose name was nearly always transformed in this way into "short boots," clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, and set down his glass on the table.

"Vatel is surely in the wrong," he answered. "In the old mother's place, I should bruise my ribs and take to my bed, I would say I was ill, and I would summon the Upholsterer and his keeper for sixty francs of damages. Monsieur Sarcus would give them to you."

"Anyhow, the Upholsterer would give the money to avoid the fuss that might be made about it," said Godain.

Vaudoyer, ex-policeman, five feet six inches in height, with

a face pitted by the smallpox and hollowed out after the nut-cracker pattern, held his peace and looked dubious at this.

"Well, what now?" asked Tonsard, whose mouth watered for those sixty francs. "What is ruffling you now, great noodle? Sixty francs to my mother would put me in the way of making something out of it! We will raise a racket for three hundred francs, and Monsieur Gourdon might as well go up to the Aigues and tell them that mother's hip has been put out."

"And they would put it out for her," his wife went on; "these things are done in Paris."

"That would cost entirely too much," objected the prudent Godain.

"I have heard too much talk about the lawyers to feel sure that things will go as you wish," Vaudoyer said at last; he had often been present in court, and had assisted Ex-sergeant Soudry. "At Soulanges it would be all right even now; Monsieur Soudry represents the Government, and there is no love lost between him and the Upholsterer. But if you attack Vatel, they will be sharp enough to defend the case; and they will say, 'The woman was in the wrong; she had a sapling in her bundle, or she would have let the forester look into her faggots on the road; she would not have run away; and if anything happened to her, she has only her own misdoings to blame for it.' No, it is not a case to be sure of."

"Did the master defend the case when I summoned him?" said Courtecuisse. "Not he. He paid me."

"I will go to Soulanges if you like," said Bonnébault, "and ask Monsieur Gourdon, the registrar, what he thinks, and I will let you know this evening if there is anything in it."

"You only want an excuse for going to see that great goose, Socquard's girl," said Marie Tonsard, slapping Bonnébault on the shoulder as if she meant to sound his lungs.

Just at that moment came a fragment of an old Burgundian Christmas carol:

"A brave deed once He did, I wot,
When as our Lord did dine,
The water in the waterpot
He turned to Malmsey wine."

Everybody recognized Daddy Fourchon's voice, raised in a ditty which must have been peculiarly pleasing to the old man. Mouche piped an accompaniment in childish treble.

"Oh, they have had a blow out!" Granny Tonsard called out to her daughter; "your father is as red as a gridiron, and the child is dyed the color of a vine-stem."

"Hail!" cried the old man, "you rascals are here in full force! Hail!" he added, turning suddenly on his granddaughter, who had her arms about Bonnébault. "Hail, Mary! full of vices, Satan be with thee, cursed be thou above all women, and the rest of it. Hail, fellows! You are caught now! You may say good-by to your sheaves! Here is news for you! I told you so, I told you that the master yonder would be one too many for you! Well, then, he will have the law of you and make you smart for it! Ah! see what comes of measuring yourselves with the bourgeois! The bourgeois have made so many laws that they have a law for every little thing——"

Here an alarming hiccough suddenly gave a new direction to the venerable orator's ideas.

"If Vermichel were here, I would blow down his throat; he should know what Alicante means! Ah! that is a wine! If I were not a Burgundian, I would be a Spaniard! A wine of God! The pope says mass with it, I know! What a wine! I am young again! I say, Short Boots, if your wife were here—I think she would be young too! Spanish wine beats spiced wine; no question about it! There ought to be another Revolution, only to clear out the cellars——"

"But what is the news, dad?" asked Tonsard.

"There will be no harvest for the like of you. The Upholsterer will put a stop to the gleaning!"

"Stop the gleaning!" Every voice in the tavern went up as one voice, dominated by the shrill notes of four women.

"Yes," piped Mouche; "and he will issue a proclamation by Groison, and have notices stuck up all over the canton; and no one is to glean except those who have paupers' certificates."

"And, get hold of the meaning of *this*," said Fourchon, "other communes will not be allowed to sneak in."

"What's up?" said Bonnébault. "Neither my grandmother nor I, nor your mother, Godain, are to be allowed to glean here? Pretty tricks these of the authorities! Plague take them! Why this general, your mayor, is a perfect hell-broke-loose——"

"Are you going to glean all the same, Godain?" asked Tonsard, turning to the ploughwright's assistant, who was talking aside with Catherine.

"*I?*" asked Godain. "I have nothing; so I am a pauper, and I shall ask for a certificate."

"Just tell me what they gave daddy for his otter, honey?" said the comely mistress of the house. Mouche, sitting on his aunt's knee, was quite overcome by the effort to digest his late meal; his eyes were heavy with the two bottles of wine consumed therewith, but he laid his head on his aunt's neck, and murmured cunningly—

"I do not know; but he has gold! Keep me like a fighting-cock for a month, and I might find out for you where he hides his money, for he has a hoard somewhere."

"Father has gold!" said La Tonsard in low tones, meant only for her husband, whose voice rose above the storm of heated discussion in which the whole tavern joined.

"Hush!" cried the old sentinel. "Here's Groison!"

Deep silence prevailed in the tavern. When Groison might

be supposed to be out of earshot, Granny Tonsard gave the signal, and again the discussion broke out: Would it be possible to glean as heretofore without having a pauper's certificate?

"You will be made to obey, that is certain," said old Fourchon, "for the Upholsterer has gone to see the prefect and ask him to call the soldiers out to keep order. They will shoot you down like dogs—which we are!" wailed the old man, struggling with the torpid influence which the Alicante exerted on his tongue.

This second announcement made by Fourchon, preposterous though it was, produced an effect. The audience grew thoughtful; they quite believed that the Government was capable of massacring them without mercy. Bonnébault spoke—

"There was this sort of trouble round about Toulouse when I was stationed there," said he. "We marched out, the peasants were cut down and arrested. It was a joke to see them trying to make a stand against regular troops. Ten of them were sent off to the hulks afterward and eleven more went to jail, and it all came to nothing, aye! A soldier is a soldier, and has a right to cut you civilians down, gee whoa!——"

"What is the matter with you all," asked Tonsard; "you are as scared as wild goats? Perhaps they will catch my mother or my girls with something, will they? Some one is going to be locked up, eh? Well, then, they will go to jail. The Upholsterer will not put the whole neighborhood in jail. And if he does, the King will feed them better than they feed themselves; and they warm the cells in winter."

"You are simpletons!" bellowed old Fourchon. "It is better to lie low, it is, than to fly in the man's face. If you do, you will be paid out for it. If you like the hulks—that is another thing! The work is not so hard there as it is in the fields, it is true, but you have not your liberty."

"Perhaps, after all," began Vaudoyer, who was one of the boldest in counsel, "it would be better that one of us should

risk his skin to rid the country of the Beast of Gévaudan, that has his lair by the Avonne gate——"

"Settle Michaud!" said Nicolas. "That is what I think."

"Things are not ripe yet," said Fourchon, "we should lose too much, children. What we ought to do is to make a poor mouth, and cry out that we are starving; the master and his wife up at the Aigues will be for helping us, and you will make more that way than by the gleaning."

"You are a chuckle-headed lot," shouted Tonsard. "Suppose that there is a racket with the police and the soldiers, they will not clap a whole countryside in irons; and there are the old lords and the folk at Ville-aux-Fayes, they are well disposed to back us up."

"That is true," said Courtecuisse. "Nobody complains except the Upholsterer. Messrs. de Soulanges and de Ronquerolles and the rest are content! When one thinks that if that cuirassier had been man enough to be killed with the rest of them, I should be snug at my Avonne gate at this day, and that he has turned me topsy-turvy till I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels——"

"They will not call the soldiers out for a beggarly bourgeois who is at loggerheads with the whole neighborhood round," said Godain. "It is his own fault. He must needs upset everything and everybody here; Government will tell him to go and hang himself."

"That is just what Government will say; Government can't help itself—poor Government!" said Fourchon, smitten with a sudden tenderness for the Government. "I am sorry for Government; 'tis a good Government. It is hard up and has not a sou, like us—which is a stupid thing for a Government when it coins the money itself. Ah! if I were Government——"

"But they told me over at Ville-aux-Fayes that de Ronquerolles had said something in the Assembly about our rights," cried Courtecuisse.

"Yes, I saw that in Mister Rigou's paper," said Vaudoyer, who could read and write, in his quality of ex-policeman.

In spite of his maudlin tenderness, old Fourchon had been following the discussion, as well as the by-play which made it interesting, with close and intelligent attention. Suddenly he contrived to get on his feet and take up his position in the midst of the tavern.

"Listen to the old one, he is tipsy," said Tonsard; "he has twice as much mischief in him, his own and the wine——"

"Spanish wine! that makes three!" broke in Fourchon, laughing like a satyr. "Children, you must not take the bull by the horns, you are not strong enough; take him in flank! Sham dead, lie like sleeping dogs! The little woman has had a good frightening by now; things will not go on like this much longer, you will see. Her will leave the place, and if her goes the Upholsterer will go too, for he dotes upon her. That is the way to do it. But to hurry them away, I advise you to take their councilor from them, their stronghold, our spy, our *ape*."

"Who is that?"

"Eh! why, 'tis the cursed curé!" said Tonsard, "he that rakes up sins and would like to feed us on holy wafers."

"Right you are!" cried Vaudoyer, "we did very well without the curé. Something ought to be done to rid us of the wafer-eater. He is the common enemy."

"The whipper-snapper," said Fourchon (this was a nick-name given to the curé on account of his shabby appearance), "may fall into the hands of some sly hussy, for he keeps every fast day. Then if he were caught on the spree there would be a fine hubbub, and his bishop would have to send him somewhere else. Old Rigou, good soul, would be mightily pleased. If Courtecuisse's girl would leave her place at Auxerre, she is so pretty that if she turned pious she would save the country. Ta, ran, tan ti!"

"And why should it not be *you?*" whispered Godain to

Catherine. "There would be a basketful of crowns to be made out of it for hush-money, and you would be mistress here at once."

"Are we going to glean or are we not?" cried Bonnébault. "Much I care for your abbé. I am from Conches, and we have no parson there to harrow our consciences with his gab."

"Wait a bit," opined Vaudoyer. "Some one ought to go to old Rigou (he knows the law) and ask him if the Upholsterer can stop our gleaning. He will tell us if we are in the right. If the Upholsterer is within the law, then we will see about taking him in flank, as the old one says."

"There will be blood shed," said Nicolas, rising to his feet (he had finished off the bottle of wine which Catherine had set before him to keep him quiet). "If you will listen to me, some one will bring down Michaud; but you are a sappy lot of dawdlers!"

"Not me!" said Bonnébault. "If you are the friends to keep mum about it, I will undertake to bring down the Upholsterer myself! What fun to lodge a bullet in his bread-basket! I should have my revenge on all my stuck-up officers."

"There, there!" cried Jean-Louis Tonsard, who had come in since old Fourchon entered. Some said that Gaubertin was Jean-Louis' father. The young fellow had succeeded to Tonsard's occupation of clipping hedges and arbors and the like offices. He went to well-to-do houses, chatted with masters and servants, and by dint of picking up ideas in this way he became the man of resource and most knowing member of the family. For the last few months Jean-Louis had paid court to Rigou's pretty servant-girl, and in this matter, as will very shortly be seen, he justified the high opinion entertained of his shrewdness.

"Well, prophet, what is the matter?" asked his parent.

"You are playing the bourgeois' game, I tell you," said

Jean-Louis. "Frighten the gentry at the Aigues so as to maintain your rights, well and good; but as for driving them out of the place and having the Aigues put up for auction, that is what the bourgeois want in the valley, but it is not to our interest to do it. If you help to divide up the big estates, where are the National lands to come from in the revolution that's coming? You will get the land for nothing then, just as old Rigou did; but once let the bourgeois chew up the land, they will spit it out in much smaller and dearer bits. You will work for them, like all the others who are working for Rigou. Look at Courtecuisse!"

The policy set forth in this harangue was too profound for wine-flustered wits. Every one present, Courtecuisse excepted, was putting money by. Every one meant to have his share of the loaf of the Aigues. So they allowed Jean-Louis to talk on, and kept up private conversations among themselves, after the manner of the Chamber of Deputies.

"Well, now, you hear that! You will be Rigou's cat's-paws," cried Fourchon, the only one who caught the drift of the speech made by his grandson.

Just at that moment Langlumé, the miller from the Aigues, happened to pass. La Tonsard hailed him.

"So it is true, is it, that they are going to stop the gleaning, Mister Deputy-mayor?"

Langlumé, a jovial-looking little man with a floury countenance and whitish-gray suit of clothes, came up the steps, and immediately every peasant looked serious.

"Lord, boys, yes and no. The really poor will glean; but the steps that will be taken will be greatly to your interests——"

"How so?" inquired Godain.

"Why, if they prevent all the poor folk from pouring in on us," said the miller, with a shrewd Norman's wink, "that will not hinder the rest of you from going to glean elsewhere; unless all the mayors copy the mayor of Blangy."

"So, it is true?" asked Tonsard, with menace in his looks.

"For my own part," said Bonnébault, as he tilted his foraging cap over one ear, and twirled his hazel switch till it whistled about him; "I am going back to Conches to give warning to friends there." And with that the Lovelace of the valley went out, whistling the tune of the martial ditty—

> "You know the Hussars of the Guard,
> And you don't know the Trombone in the Band?"

"I say, Marie!" the old grandmother called, "your sweetheart is going a droll way round to Conches."

Marie sprang to the door. "He is going to see Aglaé!" she cried. "That goose of a girl yonder wants a good basting, once for all."

"Here, Vaudoyer," said Tonsard, "just go and see old Rigou. Then we shall know what to be at. He is our oracle; what he spouts out costs nothing."

"Here is another piece of folly," exclaimed Jean-Louis under his breath. "He does nothing for nothing. Annette spoke truth; he is a worse counselor than anger."

"I recommend you to be careful," added Langlumé, "for the general went to the prefecture about your misdoings, and Sibilet said that he vowed on his honor that he would go to Paris if need was, to speak with the chancellor of France, the King, and the whole shop, but he would have the law of his peasants."

"*His* peasants!"

"Oh, indeed! then perhaps we are not our own masters now?" asked Tonsard.

At this inquiry, Vaudoyer went in search of the ex-mayor, and Langlumé, who had already gone out, returned a step or two, and called back, "You pack of do-nothings! have you incomes of your own that you have a mind to be your own masters?"

The words were spoken in jest, but the profound truth in

them was felt something in the way that a horse feels a flick of the lash.

"Tra, la, la! you masters!—I say, sonny, after what you did this morning, you are more like to play a tune on the rifle than to have my clarionet in your fingers."

"Don't you worry him; he is just the one to make you bring up your wine by punching your stomach," said Catherine, turning savagely on her grandfather.

XIII.

THE PEASANTS' MONEY-LENDER.

Strategically speaking, Rigou at Blangy was a sentinel at an outpost in time of war. He kept watch over the Aigues, and thoroughly he did his work! No police spy is comparable with an amateur detective in the service of hate.

When the general first came to the Aigues, Rigou must have had his own ideas concerning the new-comer, and plans, which came to nothing on Montcornet's marriage with a Troisville; at first he appeared to be well-disposed toward the great landowner. He had shown his intentions so plainly that Gaubertin judged it expedient to offer him a share of the spoil so as to involve him in the conspiracy against the Aigues. But, before Rigou committed himself and accepted the part for which he was cast, he meant to force the general "to show his hand," as he put it.

One day after the countess was installed, a tiny, green-painted basket-chaise drove up to the main entrance of the Aigues. In it sat his worship the mayor, with the mayoress at his side. The pair stepped out of it and ascended the flight of steps to the terrace. But the countess was a devoted partisan of the bishop, the clerical party, and the Abbé Brossette; and Francois reported that "her ladyship was not at home." This piece of impertinence, which might have

been expected of a woman born in Russia, brought a yellow flush to the Benedictine's visage.

If the lady had felt any curiosity to see the man of whom the curé had said "that he was a soul in hell who plunged into sin as into a bath to refresh himself," she might perhaps have avoided that blunder. She would have been careful not to arouse in the mayor that cold-blooded hatred which Liberals bore Royalists, a hatred that could not fail to increase, when the near neighborhood kept the memory of a mortification ever fresh.

A few explanatory details concerning this man will have the double advantage of throwing light on Rigou's share of the "big business," as his two partners called it, and of portraying, at the same time, an extremely curious type. It is a rural product peculiar to France, and undiscovered as yet by any pencil. And more than this: every single detail is of immense importance considered in its bearing on the history of this valley; Rigou's house, his fashion of blowing his fire, his habits at table, his opinions and way of life—none of these things are insignificant from this point of view. In fact, the renegade illustrates in person democracy in theory and practice; he is its alpha and omega and *summum*.

Possibly you may remember the portraits of other Masters of Avarice, painted in other of these Scenes. The Provincial Miser, first and foremost—Goodman Grandet of Saumur, whose avarice was as much a part of his nature as the tiger's thirst for blood; next follows old Gobseck the bill-discounter, the Jesuit of Gold—for him the relish of money lay in the sense of power over others which it gave him, tears for him were as wine, and he was a connoisseur; then comes the Baron de Nucingen, who raised commercial cheating to the height of statecraft; and, lastly, surely you recollect a study of the household miser—old Hochon of Issoudun—or that other, grown avaricious through family ambition, little La Baudraye of Sancerre?

And yet, so diverse are the shades of the same human affections, so different the color they take up in passing through each human medium, and this is so especially the case with avarice, that there is another distinct type still left on the dissecting slab of the amphitheatre of the study of contemporary human nature. Rigou was Rigou, the Selfish Miser, or, to be more precise, a miser full of tender cares for his own comfort, but hard and indifferent where others were concerned. He was, to be brief, the ecclesiastical miser, the monk who remained a monk so long as he could squeeze the juice of the lemon called Good Living, and took the secular habit the better to dip in the public purse. Let us begin by explaining how he had come to lead a life of unbroken ease and comfort under his own roof.

Blangy, to wit the cluster of some sixty houses described in Blondet's letter to Nathan, stands on rising ground on the left bank of the Thune. Each house is surrounded by its own garden, and in consequence Blangy is an extremely pretty village. Some few of the houses are down by the waterside; at the very top of the knoll stands the village church, and beside it the house that used to be the parsonage, the churchyard lying round about the apse end, after the country fashion.

Rigou took the opportunity of laying his sacrilegious hands on the parsonage-house, built in bygone days by that good catholic, Mlle. Choin, on a bit of ground bought by her for the purpose. The church was only separated from the parsonage by the width of a terraced garden, whence there was a view over the lands of Blangy, Soulanges, and Cerneux; for the house stood between the parks of the two manors. A field lay on the side farthest from the church, a bit of land purchased by the previous curé a short time before his death. Rigou, by nature suspicious, had put up a wall about it.

As in due time the mayor declined to give up the parsonage-house for the purposes for which it was intended, the commune was obliged to buy a cottage for the curé near the

church, and to lay out five thousand francs in setting it in order, enlarging it, and adding a bit of garden to it under the wall of the sacristy, so that there might be direct communication as heretofore between the curé's house and the church.

Both houses, therefore, being built on the alignment of the church, with which their gardens apparently connected them, looked out upon a square space, which might be considered as the market-place of Blangy, and this more particularly of late years, since the count had built a communal hall, which served as a mayor's office, just opposite the curé's house, and had lodged the rural policeman in it. Furthermore, he had erected a school-house for the brothers of the *Doctrine chrétienne*,* for which the Abbé Brossette had formerly pleaded in vain. The sometime Benedictine's house and the parsonage where the young curé lived, being both contiguous to the church, were as much united as separated by the edifice, and, furthermore, they overlooked each other, and consequently the whole village knew all that went on in the Abbé Brossette's household.

The village street wound uphill from the Thune to the church, and the knoll of Blangy was crowned by strips of vineyard and peasants' gardens and a patch of copse.

Rigou's house was the best in the village ; it was built of the large flints peculiar to Burgundy, laid in yellowish mortar smoothed out in squares the size of the width of the trowel, which produced a series of wavy lines with a flint surface, usually black, protruding here and there from the mortar. Bands of yellow mortar, unspotted by flints, did duty for stone facings round the windows, the surface (in course of time) being covered with fine meandering cracks, such as you behold in old ceilings. The clumsy outside shutters were conspicuous by reason of thick coats of dragon-green paint. Scales of lichen concealed the joints of the slates on the roof.

* A religious society.

It was a typical Burgundian house, such as the traveler may see by thousands as he crosses this part of France.

The house-door opened upon a corridor, in the middle of which the wooden staircase rose. As soon as you entered you saw the door of a large sitting-room lighted by three windows, which looked out upon the square. The kitchen, contrived underneath the staircase, looked into a yard neatly paved with cobble-stones, with a large double-leaved gate on the side of the street. So much for the first floor.

There were three rooms on the second floor, and a little attic filled the space in the roof above.

Outside, in the yard, a woodshed, stable and coach-house occupied the side at right angles to the house ; and on a floor above the rickety erection there was a fruit-loft and a servant's bedroom. Opposite the house stood the cowshed and the pigstyes.

The garden was about an acre in extent and inclosed by walls. It was a curé's garden, full of espaliers, fruit-trees, and trellis vines, and sanded garden-walks with pyramid fruit-trees on either side, and squares of potherbs manured with stable litter. The croft above the house had also been planted with trees and inclosed within walls ; it was a space large and productive enough to keep a couple of cows all the year round.

Inside the house the sitting-room was wainscoted to elbow height and hung with old tapestry. The furniture of walnut-wood, brown with age, and covered with needlework, was in keeping with the old-fashioned rooms and ceiling. The three main beams were visible and painted, but the intervening spaces were plastered. Above the walnut-wood chimney-piece stood a grotesque mirror, its sole ornament with the exception of two brass eggs mounted on marble pedestals. These objects split in half; you turned back the upper part on its hinge and it did duty as a candle-sconce. This kind of convertible candlestick with its little ornamental chains is an

invention of the days of Louis XV., and is beginning to grow scarce.

On a green and gold bracket set in the wall opposite the windows stood a clock, an excellent time-keeper in spite of its cheap case. The curtains, suspended from rings on an iron curtain-rod, were fifty years old at least, and made of a cotton material, of a checked pattern, very similar to the cottons printed in pink and white squares that used to come from the Indies. A sideboard and a table completed the list of furniture, which was kept spotlessly clean.

By the hearth stood a huge easy-chair, dedicated to Rigou's sole use; and in the corner above the low whatnot, which he used as a desk, hung from a brass-headed nail a pair of bellows of the commonest kind. To that pair of bellows Rigou owed his prosperity.

From this bald description, which rivals an auctioneer's sale-catalogue for brevity, the reader might easily be led to imagine that the furniture of M. and Mme. Rigou's respective chambers was limited to strict necessaries, which would be a delusion. Rigou's parsimony was not of the kind that denies itself any material comfort. Wherefore the most fastidious fine lady could have slept luxuriously in the bed made for Rigou; the mattresses were of the best, the sheets fine and soft, the down bed had once been the gift of some devout woman to a reverend churchman. Ample curtains shut out cold draughts. And, as will be seen, it was the same with everything else.

At the outset the miser had reduced his wife, who could neither read, write, nor cipher, to slavish obedience. She, poor creature, had ruled her late master, only to become her husband's servant and drudge. She cooked and washed for him with little or no help from the young person named Annette, a very handsome girl of nineteen, as much a slave to Rigou as her mistress, with thirty francs a year for her wage.

Mme. Rigou was tall, gaunt and weazened-looking; all the

red in her sallow face was gathered on the cheek-bones; her head was always tied up in a handkerchief, and she wore the same skirt all the year round. She did not pass a couple of hours out of her house in a month, and spent her consuming energy on household work, in a way which only the most zealous domestic could or would have done. It would have puzzled the keenest observer to discover in the woman a trace of the splendid figure, the fresh Rubens coloring, the full-blown comeliness, the superb teeth, and the maiden glances that first attracted Curé Niseron's attention to the girl. A single confinement (she had one daughter, Mme. Soudry junior) had decimated her teeth, bleared her eyes, and withered her complexion; her eyelashes had fallen out. It seemed as if the hand of God had been heavy on the priest's wife.

Yet, like every well-to-do farmer's wife, she loved to look through her stores of silk in the piece and unworn dresses.

Her drawers were full of laces and trinkets, which only caused Rigou's young servant-girls to commit the sin of envy, and to wish her death; her finery had never served any other purpose. She was one of those half-animal creatures who are born to live instinctively. As the once lovely Arsène had been no schemer, the late Niseron's disposition of his property would be an insoluble mystery but for the clue. An odd circumstance had inspired him with the notion of disinheriting his kin. The story ought to be told for the benefit of that vast proportion of mankind who have expectations.

There had been a time when Mme. Niseron, the Republican's wife, had overwhelmed her husband's uncle with attentions, for there was an imminent prospect of succeeding to the property of an old man of seventy-two, and some forty and odd thousand francs would be enough to keep the family of his only relation and heir-at-law in very tolerable comfort. The late Mme. Niseron was somewhat impatiently expecting this desirable increase of fortune, for, beside her son, she was

the happy mother of a sweet little girl, a mischievous, innocent child. Perhaps it is because such children are doomed to die in childhood that in their childhood they are so complete, for the little one died at fourteen of "pale color," as chlorosis is popularly called. She was the will-o'-the-wisp of the parsonage, and as much at home in her great-uncle's house as in her own. She had it all her own way there. She was fond of Mademoiselle Arsène, the handsome servant-maid whom the curé took into his house in 1789. Revolutionary storms had even then relaxed ecclesiastical discipline. Hitherto he had had an elderly housekeeper, but old Mlle. Pichard felt that she was failing, and sent her niece, Arsène, thinking, no doubt, to hand over her rights to that comely damsel.

In 1791, soon after the old curé offered an asylum to Dom Rigou and Frère Jean, little Geneviève took it into her head to play a very innocent childish prank. One day at the parsonage Arsène and several children were playing at the game in which each child in turn hides some object which the others try to find, and calls out, "Burning!" or "Freezing!" as the seekers are nearer or farther from the object. Little Geneviève, seized with a sudden whim, hid the bellows in Arsène's bed. The bellows could not be found, the children gave up the game, Geneviève's mother came to bring her home, and the child quite forgot to hang the bellows from the nail again.

For a whole week Arsène and her aunt looked for the bellows, then they too "gave it up;" it is possible to live without a pair of bellows, the old curé blew up his fire with an old ear-trumpet, made in times when everybody had one, which proves beyond a doubt that the curé's ear-trumpet had belonged to some courtier of the time of Henri III. But at length, about a month before the aunt died, the Abbé Mouchon, the curé from Soulanges, and the whole Niseron family came to dinner at the parsonage, and the housekeeper broke

out into renewed jeremiads over the bellows which had so mysteriously disappeared.

"Eh!" cried little Geneviève Niseron, bursting out laughing. "Why, I hid them in Arsène's bed a fortnight ago; if she had made her bed, the great lazy thing, she would have found them."

In 1791 every one was free to laugh; but the deepest silence followed the laughter.

"There is nothing to laugh at," said the old housekeeper; "Arsène has been sitting up with me since my illness began."

In spite of this explanation, the curé of Blangy looked daggers at Mme. Niseron and her husband, such a look as a priest can give when he thinks that a trap has been laid for him.

Then the housekeeper died, and Dom Rigou managed to exasperate the Abbé Niseron against his nephew to such purpose that Francois Niseron was disinherited by a will made in Arsène Picard's favor.

All this had happened long ago, but in 1823 grateful sentiment still led Rigou to blow the fire with the ear-trumpet, and the pair of bellows still hung from the nail.

Mme. Niseron doted on her little girl, and when the child died in 1794 the mother followed her within the year. When the curé died, Citizen Rigou took the burden of Arsène's concerns upon himself by taking her to wife. The sometime lay-brother from the abbey attached himself to Rigou as a dog does to a master, and in his own person combined the offices of groom, dairyman, gardener, body-servant, and steward to this sensual Harpagon.

Rigou's daughter Arsène was married (without a portion) to the public prosecutor, Soudry junior; she inherited some share of her mother's good looks, together with her father's cunning.

Rigou had reached the age of sixty-seven. For thirty years he had not known illness; nothing seemed to shake health

that might well be called insolent. He was tall and spare. There were brownish circles about his eyes, and the eyelids were almost black. In the morning, when he exhibited a red, wrinkled, morocco-grained throat, his resemblance to a condor was but the more strikingly complete by reason of a nose of sanguine hue, immensely long, and very sharp at the tip. He was almost bald, the curious conformation of the back of his head would have alarmed any one who understood its significance; for that long ridge-shaped prominence indicates a despotic will. The grayish eyes, half-veiled by membranous webs of eyelids, were made to play a hypocrite's part. Two locks of hair, of no particular color, and so scanty that they failed to hide the skin beneath, hung about the large, pointed, rimless ears; a noticeable defect this last, for it is a certain sign of cruelty—that is, a love of inflicting mental (not physical) pain—when it does not indicate mental unsoundness. An exaggeratedly wide mouth and thin lips betrayed their owner for an undaunted trencherman and a valiant drinker by a certain droop at the corners, where two comma-shaped slits slobbered perpetually while he ate or talked. Heliogabalus must have looked like that.

His dress never varied. He always wore a long blue overcoat with a military collar, a black stock, a pair of trousers, and a roomy vest of black cloth. He had hobnails put in the heavy soles of his walking shoes, and in cold weather he wore additional soles, knitted by his wife in winter evenings. Annette and her mistress also knitted their master's socks.

Rigou's baptismal name was Grégoire, a circumstance which suggested puns that his circle of acquaintance still found irresistibly amusing, in spite of thirty years of hard wear. He was usually saluted as "Grig" or "Rigadoon," or (and most frequently of all) as *Grigou* (G. Rigou)—curmudgeon.

Want of opposition and absence of any public opinion had favored the old Benedictine's favorite pursuits. No one would imagine from the brief outline sketch of his character how far

he had advanced in the science of selfishness, of material comfort, and sensual enjoyment of every kind. In the first place, he took his meals apart. His wife and Annette waited upon him, and then sat down to table in the kitchen with Frère Jean while the master of the house digested his meal, slept off his wine, and read the paper.

In the country no periodical is known by a specific name; it is always spoken of as "the paper."

Dinner, breakfast, and supper were alike composed of dishes exquisitely prepared with the culinary skill in which a curé's housekeeper excels the rest of her sisterhood. Mme. Rigou herself, for instance, churned twice a week. Cream entered into every sauce. Vegetables, gathered at the last moment, were transferred, as it were, straight from the garden into the pot. Parisians are so accustomed to garden stuff which has lain sweltering in a store exposed to the genial influences of the sun, the tainted air of city streets, and the greengrocer's watering-can, all promotive of a specious freshness, that they have no idea of the delicate, fugitive flavors of vegetable products when eaten in some sort "alive."

The Soulanges butcher supplied his best meat, under penalty of losing the redoubtable Rigou's custom. The poultry were reared at the house, to insure superlative excellence.

A kind of hypocritical care was likewise expended on everything that conduced to Rigou's comfort. The deeply versed Thelemist might wear slippers of coarse-looking leather, but within they were lined with the softest lamb's-wool. His coat might be rough and coarse, for it never touched his skin, but his shirts (always washed at home) were of the finest Frisian lawn. The wine of the country was good enough for his wife, Annette, and Frère Jean—Rigou kept some of his own vintage for this purpose—but his own private cellar was stocked like a Fleming's; the noblest wines of Burgundy were tightly packed among wines from the Rhone, and Bordeaux, Champagne, and Roussillon, and Spain. All these

were purchased ten years in advance, and bottled by Frère Jean. The liqueurs from the Indies bore the name of Mme. Amphoux; the money-lender had laid in sufficient of these from the wreckage of a Burgundian castle to last him the term of his natural life.

Rigou ate and drank like Louis XIV., one of the largest consumers on record; the wear and tear of a life more than voluptuous betrayed itself in this constant demand for repairs.

Yet, while he denied himself nothing, he was a keen and hard bargain-driver; he would haggle over every trifle as only a churchman can haggle. He did not trouble himself overmuch, shrewd monk that he was, with precautions against cheating; he provided himself with a sample beforehand, and had the agreement made out in writing, but when the wine or the provisions were dispatched he gave the senders notice that if the bulk did not correspond in every way with the sample he should refuse delivery.

Frère Jean, who looked after the fruit, had set himself to acquire the art of keeping the finest "orchard stuff" in the department through the winter. Rigou had pears and apples, and occasionally grapes, at Easter.

Never was prophet on the borderland of deity more blindly obeyed than Rigou in every smallest whim. At a twitch of those heavy eyelids, his wife, Annette, and Frère Jean quaked for mortal fear, and of the very multiplicity of his demands he forged the chains that bound his three slaves. At every moment of their lives those hapless creatures felt conscious that they were watched, that they were under an overseer's lash; and at length they had come to take a kind of pleasure in the incessant round of toil; they were too hard-worked to feel bored, and this man's comfort was the one all-absorbing thought that filled their lives.

Annette was the tenth in a succession of comely maid-servants since the year 1795. Rigou hoped and meant that similar relays should mark his passage to the tomb. Annette

was sixteen years old when she came; at the age of nineteen she must go. Every one of these damsels, chosen from Auxerre, Clamecy and the Morvan with fastidious care, had been beguiled by bright prospects. But Mme. Rigou clung obstinately to life, and invariably when the three years were out some squabble brought about by the girl's insolence to her unhappy mistress made it imperatively necessary to part with her. Annette was a masterpiece of delicate beauty, bright and piquante, worthy to wear a ducal coronet. She was a clever girl, moreover. Rigou knew nothing of the understanding between Annette and Jean-Louis Tonsard, which proves that he was smitten with one pretty damsel to whom ambition had suggested the idea of flattering the lynx by way of throwing dust in his eyes.

The uncrowned Louis XV.* on his side was not wholly faithful to the pretty Annette. The peasants borrow to buy land beyond their means; Rigou held oppressive mortgages on these properties, and the result of it was that he made a harem of the whole valley from Soulanges to a distance of fifteen leagues beyond Conches in the direction of Brie, and this at no cost to himself. He needed only to grant stay of proceedings as the price of the fleeting pleasures on which age often wastes its substance.

This sybarite's life, therefore, cost him almost nothing, and Bouret himself could scarce have surpassed it. Rigou's white slaves cut his hay and gathered his harvests, and brought and stacked his firewood. A peasant thinks little of giving his labor, especially if he can put off the evil day of payment of interest in that way; and though Rigou always demanded small money payments as well for a few months' grace, he squeezed some manual service out of his debtors into the bargain. They submitted to this forced labor, this *corvée* (statute-labor) in all but name, and thought that it cost them nothing because they had not to put their hands into their pockets.

* Mme. de Pompadour and Mme. du Barry ruled this monarch.

It sometimes happened that a peasant paid more than the original sum as interest on the capital lent.

Deep as a monk, silent as a Benedictine in travail of his chronicle, astute as a priest, shifty as every miser is bound to be, yet always keeping on the windward side of the law, Rigou might have made a Tiberius in ancient Rome, a Richelieu in the days of Louis XIII., or a Fouché if he had had ambition enough to assist the Convention; but in his wisdom he chose to be a Lucullus in private life, a miser-sensualist. Hatred gave zest to this occupation of harassing the count; he had every means of doing it thoroughly, and it found him mental employment. He could move the peasants at his will by secret wires, and he enjoyed the game that he played. It was like a living chess-tournament, all the pawns were alive; knights rode about on horseback, bishops babbled like old Fourchon, the towers of a feudal castle glittered in the sun, and the queen was maliciously giving check to the king.

Every day as Rigou arose he looked out of his window at the stately roof of the Aigues; he could see the smoke rising from the lodges by those lordly gateways, and to himself he would mutter, "All this shall be pulled down, I will dry up the streams and cut down the shady forest." And while he hunted his large quarry he had a more insignificant prey. The castle was to fall, but the renegade flattered himself that he would murder the Abbé Brossette by pin-pricks.

It is only necessary to add, by way of a final touch to the portrait, that the sometime monk made a practice of going to mass, regretting that his wife continued to live, and manifesting a desire to be reconciled with the church so soon as he should be a widower. He greeted the Abbé Brossette deferentially when they met, speaking suavely, never allowing his temper to get the better of him. Indeed, generally speaking, every man who has been connected with the church appears to possess the long-suffering of an insect. To her discipline her servants owe a sense of decorum which has been signally

lacking among the Frenchmen of the last twenty years, and which those who look upon themselves as well-bred men do not always possess. When the Revolution shook ecclesiastics out of their convents and threw them upon the world, the children of the church gave proof of their superior training by a coolness and reticence which never forsook them even in apostasy.

That little matter of the will in 1792 had opened Gaubertin's eyes to the depths of guile concealed by that face, with its taint of guileful hypocrisy, and from that time forth he made a confidant of the fellow-worshiper of the Golden Calf. When the firm of Leclercq was founded he gave Rigou a hint to invest fifty thousand francs in the venture and guaranteed the undertaking. Rigou became a sleeping partner of so much the more consequence because he left his money at compound interest. At the present time his interest in the house amounted to a hundred thousand francs, although in 1816 he had drawn out about eighty thousand to put into the Funds, an investment which brought him in seventeen thousand francs per annum. Lupin knew of his own knowledge that Rigou had at least a hundred and fifty thousand francs lent out in mortgages for small amounts on large bits of property. Ostensibly the money-lender derived a net income of fourteen thousand francs or thereabout from land. Altogether, it was pretty plain that Rigou's income must amount to something like forty thousand francs, but his capital was an unknown *x*, a fourth term in a proportion sum which baffled arithmetic, and the devil alone knew the ins and outs of the jobbery in which Rigou and Langlumé were concerned.

The terrible money-lender reckoned on another score of years of life, and had invented a set of hard and fast rules for his guidance in business. He never lent a farthing to a peasant unless the man was a purchaser of seven acres at the least, and had actually paid down one-half of the purchase-money. Clearly Rigou was well aware of the weak spot in our legisla-

tion with regard to the expropriation of small parcels of land, and of the danger to the Inland Revenue Department and the land-owning interest arising from the excessive subdivision of property. Where is the sense of suing a peasant for the value of a single furrow when the man has but five furrows altogether? The eyes of individual interest will always see twenty-five years ahead of the furthest vision of any legislative assembly. What a lesson for a nation! A law that is not a dead-letter always springs from the mighty brain of a single man of genius, it is not made by laying nine hundred heads together; no matter how able the men may be, taken apart, they dwarf each other in a crowd. After all, in Rigou's rule is there not the right principle? What better means have we of putting a stop to the present state of things, when land-owning is reduced to an absurdity and a square yard of soil is divided into halves, and thirds, and quarters, and tenths, as in the commune of Argenteuil, which numbers thirty thousand parcels of land?

Such reforms, however, demand coöperation as widespread as the arrangement which oppressed this arrondissement. As Rigou found Lupin about one-third of the total amount of legal business which he transacted, it was natural that the Soulanges notary should be Rigou's faithful ally. In this way the pirate could add the amount of illegal interest *to the capital* in the bond, and if the borrower was a married man he was careful to make husband and wife jointly and severally responsible. The peasant, overjoyed to have but five per cent. to pay, so long as the loan was undischarged, always hoped to rid himself of the debt by unsparing toil and by high farming, which raised the value of Rigou's security.

This is the real secret of the wonders worked by the "spade husbandry" that deludes superficial economists, a political blunder which sends French money into Germany to pay for horses. That animal is in process of extinction in France, while the breeding and grazing of horned cattle have fallen off

to such an extent that butcher meat will soon be beyond the reach, not merely of the working population, but also of the class above them.*

So sweat poured for Rigou from many a brow between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, and Rigou was respected by everybody; while the general, who paid his workers well and was the one man who brought money into the country, was cursed for his pains and hated as the rich man is hated of the poor. Would such a state of things be comprehensible but for the foregoing bird's-eye view of Mediocracy?

Fourchon had spoken truth when he said that the bourgeois had taken the place of the lords. Peasant-proprietors of the Courtecuisse type were the serfs of a modern Tiberius in the valley of Avonne, just as, in Paris, the manufacturer without capital must slave for the large capitalist's benefit.

Soudry followed Rigou's example. His area extended from Soulanges to Ville-aux-Fayes and five leagues beyond; the two money-lenders had divided the district between them.

Gaubertin's greed was on a grander scale. Not merely did he himself avoid competition with his associates, but he diverted the capital of Ville-aux-Fayes from these profitable local investments. The power exercised at elections by this triumvirate may be imagined when nearly every voter's fortunes depended upon his complacence.

Hatred, ability, and command of money—this was the formidable triangular array of the enemy intrenched by the Aigues; an enemy who watched all the general's movements; an enemy in constant communication with sixty to eighty small proprietors, each of whom had relatives or connections among the peasantry, who feared one and all of them as debtors fear a creditor.

Rigou was a Tonsard of a larger growth. Tonsard lived by plain theft. Rigou grew fat on legalized robbery. Both were fond of good living; both men were essentially of the

* See "The Village Parson."

same species; but the one was nature uncultivated, the other nature submitted to the sharpening discipline of the cloister.

It was about four o'clock that afternoon when Vaudoyer left the Grand-I-Vert to ask counsel of the ex-mayor, and Rigou dined at four. Vaudoyer, finding the house-door shut, peered in between the window-curtains.

"Monsieur Rigou!" he called. "It is I—Vaudoyer."

Frère Jean came out of the yard gate in another moment, and bade him come in with him.

"Come into the garden," said he, "the master has company."

The "company" was none other than Sibilet, who had come under the pretext of arriving at an understanding with regard to Brunet's recent notice of judgment; but, as a matter of fact, the pair were discussing a very different matter. He had come in just as the usurer was finishing his dessert.

A dazzling white cloth was spread on the square table (Rigou insisted on clean table-linen every day, caring little for the trouble given to his wife and Annette), and the visitor beheld the arrival of a bowl heaped up with strawberries and apricots, peaches, figs, almonds, and all the fruits in season, served, almost as daintily as at the Aigues, upon green vine-leaves, laid on white porcelain plates.

When Sibilet came into the room, Rigou bade him bolt the double doors (an arrangement adapted to every room in the house, with the double object of keeping out draughts and deadening sounds). Then he inquired what urgent business had brought the steward in broad daylight, when it was so much simpler and safer to come after dark.

"It is this," said Sibilet. "Here is the Upholsterer talking of going to Paris to see the keeper of the seals. He is capable of doing you a lot of harm; he may ask to have your son-in-law displaced, or for a change of judges and president, too, at Ville-aux-Fayes, more particularly when he comes to

read the notice of this new decision in your favor. He is in a towering rage. He is shrewd, too, and the Abbé Brossette who advises him is one that can enter the lists against you and Gaubertin. The priests are in power just now, and his lordship the bishop is very friendly with the Abbé Brossette. The countess said something about speaking to her cousin (the Comte de Castéran) concerning Nicolas. Then Michaud is beginning to see how the land lies."

"You are afraid," said Rigou. The words were spoken quite blandly, but the glance that accompanied them was appalling; suspicion brought something like a gleam into the dull eyes. "Are you calculating whether it would pay you better to throw in your lot with Monsieur le Comte de Montcornet?"

"I don't exactly see how I am to come honestly by four thousand francs every year to put by, as I have been doing these last five years," said Sibilet bluntly. "Monsieur Gaubertin has promised me all sorts of fine things, but matters are coming to a head, there will certainly be a collision, and it is one thing to promise and another to keep your promise after the battle is won."

"I will speak to him," said Rigou quietly, "and in the meantime this is what I would say if it were any business of mine: 'For the last five years you have been taking four thousand francs a year to Monsieur Rigou, and he, worthy man, is paying you seven and a half per cent. per annum. At this present moment you have twenty-seven thousand francs standing to your credit, for the money has been accumulating at compound interest; but as there is a certain document under private seal extant, and Monsieur Rigou has a duplicate copy, the steward of the Aigues will be dismissed on the day when the Abbé Brossette lays that document before the Upholsterer, more especially if an anonymous letter is sent beforehand to warn him that his steward is playing a double game. So you would do better to hunt with us, without ask-

ing for your bone in advance, and so much the more so since that Monsieur Rigou is not legally bound to pay you either compound interest or seven and a half per cent. on your money; and if you tried to recover, he would let you sue him and pay the money into court; and before you could touch your twenty thousand francs the matter would be spun out with delays till judgment was given in the court of Ville-aux-Fayes. If you behave yourself discreetly when Monsieur Rigou is owner of your house at the Aigues property, you might keep on there with thirty thousand francs of your own, and thirty thousand more which he might feel disposed to lend you; and that would be so much the better for you, because, as soon as the Aigues is split up into little lots, the peasants will be down upon them like poverty upon the world.' That is what Monsieur Gaubertin might say to you; but for my own part I have nothing to say, it is no business of mine. Gaubertin and I have our grounds for complaint against this child of the people who beats his own father, and we are carrying out our own ideas. If Friend Gaubertin needs you, I myself have need of nobody, for every one is very much at my service. As to the keeper of the seals, 'tis an office that changes hands pretty often, while some of us are always here."

"At any rate, you have had warning," said Sibilet, feeling that he had been a consummate ass.

"Of what?" demanded Rigou, with artful subtlety.

"Of the Upholsterer's intentions," said the steward meekly; "he has gone to the prefecture in a towering rage."

"Let him go. If Montcornet and his like did not wear out carriage wheels, what would become of the coach-builders?"

"I will bring you three thousand francs to-night at eleven o'clock," said Sibilet; "but you might help me on a little by making over one of your mortgages to me; one where the man is getting behindhand—one that might bring me one or two nice little bits of land——"

"There is Courtecuisse's mortgage. I want to handle him

carefully, for he is the best shot in the department. If I transferred him to you, it would look as though the Upholsterer were harassing the rascal through you, and that would kill two birds with one stone. He would be ready for anything when he saw that he was sinking lower than old Fourchon. Courtecuisse is wearing his life out at the Bâchelerie; he has been putting in espaliers along the garden walls, and altogether the place has improved very much. The little farm is worth four thousand francs; the count would give you that much for the three acres of land behind his stables. If Courtecuisse were not a gormandizing rogue, he would have paid the interest with the game killed there."

"Very well. Transfer the mortgage to me; it will put butter on my bread. I shall have the house and garden for nothing, and the count will buy the three acres."

"What am I to have?"

"Good Lord! you would draw blood from a stone!" cried Sibilet. "And here have I just got an order out of the Upholsterer to set the law in motion to regulate the gleaning."

"You have gained that point, have you, my lad?" asked Rigou, who had himself suggested the idea to Sibilet a few days previously, and recommended him to pass it on in the shape of advice to the general. "We have him now! It is all over with him! But it is not enough simply to have a hold on him; he must be twisted up like a quid of tobacco. Just draw the bolts, my lad, and tell my wife to bring in coffee and liqueurs for me, and tell Jean to put the horse in. I am going over to Soulanges. See you again in the evening. Good-day, Vaudoyer," the ex-mayor beheld his former rural policeman. "Well, what is it?"

Vaudoyer gave a full account of the day's events at the Grand-I-Vert, and ended by asking Rigou whether the general had the law on his side.

"He has a right to do so," said Rigou decisively. "We have a hard lord of the manor, and the Abbé Brossette is a

shrewd fellow. Your curé put these notions into his head, because you don't go to mass, you pack of heretics? *I* am careful to go myself. There is a God, you see! You will have to drink to the dregs, the Upholsterer will always be beforehand with you——"

"Very good. We will glean," said Vaudoyer, in the dogged tone of a Burgundian.

"Without a pauper's certificate?" queried the usurer. "They say that he has gone to the prefecture to ask for the soldiers so as to make you return to your duty——"

"We will glean as we have done in the past," Vaudoyer repeated.

"Glean! Monsieur Sarcus will see if you are right," said the money-lender, and his manner seemed to promise that the justice of the peace would protect the gleaners.

"We will glean and we shall be there in force—or Burgundy will no longer be Burgundy," said Vaudoyer. "If the gendarmes have swords, we have scythes, and we shall see!"

At half-past four the great green-painted yard-gates of the old parsonage turned on their hinges, Frère Jean appeared leading the bay horse by the bridle, and the chaise turned out into the square. Mme. Rigou and Annette stood on the step in front of the house-door watching the little green basket-chaise and the master ensconced on the snug cushions under the leather hood.

"Don't stay out late, sir," said Annette, with a little pout of the lips.

By this time all the village had heard of the mayor's threatened proclamation, and the folk came to their doors, or stopped short in the main street, to watch Rigou pass. They fondly thought that he was going to Soulanges to defend their rights.

"Well, well, Madame Courtecuisse, our old mayor will be going to take our part, no doubt," said an old woman with a spindle in her hands; she was deeply interested in the ques-

A TUG AT HIS GRANDFATHER'S BLOUSE, WHICH SENT THE OLD MAN OVER ON TO THE MOUND.

tion of forest rights, for her husband sold the stolen faggots in Soulanges.

"Dear me! yes; it makes his heart bleed to see such things going on, he is as sorry about it as any of you," answered Courtecuisse's wife. Poor woman, she quaked at the bare mention of the money-lender's name, and praised him from sheer fear and trembling.

"Ah! I don't want to make too much of it; but he has been badly treated, he has! Good-day, Monsieur Rigou," said the old woman as she span, for Rigou gave a greeting to her as well as to his creditor's wife.

The money-lender crossed the Thune (never impassable in the worst of weather), and Tonsard, stirring abroad, spoke to Rigou on the road. "Well, Father Rigou, so the Upholsterer means to make slaves of us, does he?"

"We shall see about that," returned Rigou, touching up his horse.

"He will find a way of defending us, he will!" said Tonsard to a group of women and children who had gathered about him.

"Oh! he has you in mind; an innkeeper has his gudgeons in mind as he cleans his frying-pan," remarked Fourchon.

"You just keep your clapper quiet when you are drunk," said Mouche, with a tug at his grandfather's blouse, which sent the old man over on to the mound at the foot of a poplar. "If the rascally monk heard what you said, he would not give so much for your words——"

As a matter of fact, the real cause of Rigou's hasty visit to Soulanges was the weighty news which Sibilet had brought, news that seemed to threaten the secret coalition among the bourgeoisie of the Avonne valley.

BOOK II.

I.

THE BEST SOCIETY OF SOULANGES.

Six kilometres from Blangy, "be the same more or less" (to borrow the legal formula), and at a like distance from Ville-aux-Fayes, the little town of Soulanges rises amphitheatre-fashion up a hillside, a spur of the long *côte* (rib) which runs parallel to the other ridge above the Avonne. Soulanges the Picturesque, as they call it, has a better claim to the title than Mantes itself.

Under this long low hill the Thune widens out over a bed of clay into a sheet of water some thirty acres in extent, with all the mills of Soulanges dotted over the little cluster of islands at the end, composing a picture as charming as any that the landscape gardener's art can devise. Farther yet the Thune feeds all the rivers and artificial water in Soulanges park, and flows at last through a stately channel to join the Avonne.

Opposite the town stands the castle of Soulanges, one of the finest manor-houses in Burgundy, built in the reign of Louis XIV. from Mansard's designs. The local road winds between the town and the aforesaid sheet of water, vaingloriously dubbed "the Lake of Soulanges" by the townspeople.

The picturesqueness of the little place is Swiss rather than French in character; you shall scarcely find such another town in France. Blondet, it may be remembered, compared it in his letter to Swiss scenery, and. in fact, it reminds you of the charming outskirts of Neuchâtel, the gay vineyards that engirdle Soulanges heightening a resemblance which would be complete but for the absence of Alps or Jura range. The

streets rise one above another on the hillside; the houses stand apart in separate gardens, so that the general effect of the town is not the usual one of a crowd of dwellings packed together, but of masses of greenery and blue or red roofs among the flowers and trees, pleached alleys, and terraced walks, of many-colored detail blended into a picturesque whole.

In the Middle Ages the lords of Soulanges, in their munificence, built the church of stone, reserving for themselves a chapel in the choir and another chapel in the crypt for their family vault. A border of richly ornamented circles filled with small carved figures follows the outline of the great arch of the doorway (as at the church of Longjumeau), and a shaft terminating in a pinnacle stands in a niche on either side. Up above, in a triglyph, sits a sculptured virgin with the Infant Saviour in her arms. It is a kind of doorway common enough among such little churches of that date as have had the luck to escape the ravages of the Calvinists. The outer walls of the aisles consist of five arches, outlined by mouldings, and filled in with masonry pierced here and there by windows. The flying buttresses of the apse are worthy of a cathedral. The square-based belfry tower, built over one of the chancels, is a landmark in the countryside, for the church stands at the upper end of the great market-place at Soulanges, through which the road passes on its lowest side.

This market-place at Soulanges is a fair-sized open space surrounded by a collection of quaint-looking houses built about it at various times. A good few of them are built half of brick, half of timber, with a waistband of slates about their middles to protect the principal beams. These have stood there since the Middle Ages. Others, built of stone and adorned with balconies, display the gable beloved of our grandsires, which dates back as far as the twelfth century. Several attract your eyes by their quaint jutting beams covered with grotesque figures, which call up memories of the times

when every burgher was a merchant and lived above his store. But most magnificent of all is the sculptured facade of the ancient mansion-house of the bailiwick, standing in a line with the church, to which it furnishes a worthy companion-building. This old house was sold by the nation and bought by the commune, to do duty as town hall, mayor's office, and court-house, for M. Sarcus had sat there since the institution of justices of the peace.

This outline sketch will give the reader some idea of the market-square of Soulanges, where the charming central fountain stands which Marshal Soulanges brought from Italy in 1520. No great city need blush to own such a monument. A jet of water, brought from a spring high up on the hillside, plays perpetually over a group of four white marble Cupids, who bear a basket full of grapes on their heads, and distribute the water from the conch shells in their hands.

Perhaps Émile Blondet is the last lettered traveler who will pass that way; but if in the coming time another should penetrate to Soulanges, he will at once recognize in the market-square, the "public place" of Spanish drama and Molière's plays, an old familiar piece of stage scenery, and abiding witness to the fact that comedy is the invention of a warm climate, where the business of life is largely carried on out of doors and in public. The market-place at Soulanges resembles the conventional square of the stage the more closely in that the two principal streets of the town enter it from either side just opposite the fountain, furnishing an exact equivalent of the wings whence masters and servants issue to meet, and whither they fly to avoid each other.

At the corner of one of these streets, Maître Lupin's escutcheon hung, gloriously conspicuous. The square is the aristocratic quarter of Soulanges; Sarcus, Guerbet the receiver of taxes, Brunet, Gourdon the registrar, and his brother the doctor, and old M. Gendrin-Vattebled, crown agent of woods and forests, all lived round about it, and, being mindful of the

name given to their town, all made a point of keeping their houses in handsome repair.

"Madame Soudry's house," as it was called (for the first person in the commune was totally eclipsed by the potent personality of the late Mlle. Laguerre's waiting-woman)—Mme. Soudry's house was entirely modern. It had been built by a wealthy wine merchant, a Soulanges man who had made money in Paris and returned in 1793 to buy corn for his native town. The mob massacred him for a "regrater," a miserable stonemason (Godain's uncle) having raised the cry after a dispute which arose out of the building of the fine new house.

The next-of-kin quarreled so long and heartily over the property, that when Soudry came back in 1798 he was able to buy the wine-merchant's palace for one thousand crowns *in coin.* He let it at first to the department for a police-station; but in 1811 Mlle. Cochet (whom he consulted on all points) warmly opposed a renewal of the lease; it was impossible to live in a house "in concubinage with the barracks," she said. So a police-station was built in a side-street close to the town hall for the gendarmerie, at the expense of the town of Soulanges, and the police-sergeant's house, being relieved of the defiling presence of the gendarmerie and their horses, was forthwith swept and garnished.

It is a single-story house, with attics in the mansard roof. On three sides it looks out over a wide view; to wit, over the market-place, the "lake," and the garden; but the fourth gives upon the yard which lies between it and the neighboring house of a grocer—Wattebled by name—a man who did not move in the "best society" in Soulanges. He was the father of the "beautiful Mme. Plissoud," of whom more must presently be said.

Every little town has its "beautiful Madame Such-an-one," just as its boasts its Socquard and its Café of Peace.

It is easy to guess that the side of the house which overlooks the lake likewise looks out upon a terraced garden,

sloping, not over-steeply, down to the stone balustrade, which borders it along the roadside. On every step of the flight which descends from the terrace to the garden stands a myrtle, or pomegranate, or an orange-tree, visible justifications of a small conservatory below—a *preservatory*, as Mme. Soudry persistently miscalls it. The house-door on the side of the market-place is approached by a short flight of steps. The great gateway is seldom used, except on great occasions, after the usual habit of a country town, or to admit the tradespeople or the master's horse. The friends of the family paid their calls on foot and climbed the flight of steps to the street-door.

The Soudry mansion is a dreary-looking house. Every course of masonry is marked out by "channel joints," as masons call them; the mouldings round the windows are alternately thick and thin, after the style of the Gabriel and Perronnet wings of the Tuileries. Such architectural ornament in a very small town gives a monumental look to a house already grown famous in the district.

In the opposite corner of the market-place stood Socquard's celebrated Café of Peace, which, with the too enchanting Tivoli, deserves a more detailed description in its place than the Soudry mansion.

Rigou very seldom came to Soulanges; for everybody—Lupin the Notary, Gaubertin, Soudry, and Gendrin—alike went to Blangy to call on him—such fear men had of Rigou. But any experienced person, and the ex-Benedictine was experienced, would have imitated his reserve. In order to make this clear, it is necessary to give a sketch of the personages who were spoken of in the neighborhood as belonging to the "best society of Soulanges."

The oddest figure among them all was, as you may imagine, Mme. Soudry herself. Hers is a portrait that demands an infinity of minute touches, if it is to do justice to the original.

Mme. Soudry permitted herself "a suspicion of rouge,"

in imitation of Mlle. Laguerre; but that suspicion, by sheer force of habit, had become an unmistakable patch of vermilion on either cheek, such as our grandsires picturesquely described as "carriage wheels." As the wrinkles deepened and multiplied on the mayoress' countenance, she vainly tried to fill them up with paint; then finding that her brow grew too sallow by far, and her temples showed time's polish, she laid on ceruse,* and traced out a network of youthful veins in a delicate blue. The painting enhanced the liveliness of eyes that were bold enough already, insomuch that the mask would have struck a stranger as something passing strange; but Soulanges, being accustomed to this brilliant display of art, regarded Mme. Soudry as a great beauty.

With a clumsy shapeless figure she wore her gowns cut low at the throat, displaying shoulders and bosom whitened and enameled to match her face; but, luckily, a desire to flaunt her magnificent laces induced her to partially veil these chemical products. She always wore a stiff corset bodice of prodigious depth, bedizened with knots even down to the extreme point, and her skirts rustled with silk and furbelows.

Her apparel justified the use of the word *attire*, which will soon be inexplicable. This evening she wore brocade of price, for she had a hundred dresses, each one richer than the last, all from Mlle. Lauguerre's vast and splendid wardrobe, and all remodeled by her in the height of the fashion of the year 1808. Mme. Soudry's gorgeous cap, adorned with loops of cherry-colored satin to match the ribbons on her gown, seemed to ride triumphant on the powdered waves of her yellow wig.

Try to imagine beneath that too fascinating headgear a monkey face of monstrous ugliness; a snub nose, meagre enough for a death's head, separated by a broad space of bristles from a mouthful of artificial teeth in which the sounds were entangled as in a hunting-horn—and though it may

* A cosmetic prepared with white lead.

puzzle you to discover how the best society, and, in fact, the whole town of Soulanges, could regard Mme. Soudry as a beauty, the mental process may recall to your mind a recent succinct treatise *ex professo* by one of the wittiest women of our day on the art of acquiring a reputation for beauty by the judicious selection and management of accessories.

Mme. Soudry had, in the first place, surrounded herself with the splendid presents which had been heaped upon her mistress—spoils of war, as the sometime Benedictine called them. And, in the second, she had turned her ugliness to account by emphasizing it and carrying it with a certain air which can only be acquired in Paris, a knack known to the vulgarest Parisienne, who is always more or less of a mimic. Mme. Soudry's figure, much restricted round the waist, was enormous about the hips; she wore diamonds in her ears and loaded her fingers with rings; and, by way of final adornment, a cockchafer, twin topazes with a diamond head, blazed from the height of her bodice in a cleft between two mountains besprinkled with pearl powder. This jewel, a gift from "dear mistress," was the talk of the department. Mme. Soudry's arms were invariably bare (another practice copied from Mlle. Laguerre), and she fluttered an ivory fan painted by Boucher with two tiny roses by way of stud-pins.

When Mme. Soudry walked abroad she carried a real eighteenth-century parasol above her head, a bamboo frame covered with green silk, and bordered with a green fringe; thus equipped, any passer-by who should have seen her on the terrace might have taken her (at a sufficient distance) for a figure out of one of Watteau's* pictures.

In that drawing-room, hung with crimson brocade and crimson curtains lined with white silk, where the mantel was covered with knick-knacks and souvenirs of the palmy days of Louis XV., with the fire-dogs and andirons on the hearth (lily stems borne aloft by infant Cupids), where the furniture, *à*

* Noted for his "shepherdess" paintings.

pieds de biche,* was covered with gilding, it was conceivable how the mistress of the mansion had come by the title of "the beautiful Mme. Soudry." The house came to be a kind of local superstition in the principal town in the district.

And if the best society of Soulanges believed in its queen, that queen had no less belief in herself. In the space of seven years La Cochet had so completely succeeded in sinking the lady's-maid in the mayoress, that not merely had Soulanges forgotten her late employment, but she herself had begun to believe that she was a gentlewoman. So well did she remember her mistress' ways, her manner, her gestures, her falsetto voice, the little movements of her head, that when she surrounded herself with that mistress' opulence she reproduced her insolence. Mme. Soudry knew her eighteenth century; she had anecdotes of great nobles, like their inter-relationships, at her fingers' ends, and her back-stairs erudition provided her with a stock of conversation which smacked of familiarity with *Œil-de-bœuf* (lit.: ox-eye, really meaning a round keyhole-worn eye). Her waiting-woman's small-talk passed current in her circle for the most refined wit. Intrinsically, if you will, the mayoress was a counterfeit gem; but how should barbarians know the difference between the diamond and its paste imitation?

She, too, in her own circle, was a divinity, as her mistress had been in her day; she was flattered by those who were sure of a dinner at her house once a week, and of coffee and liqueurs if (as not seldom happened) they dropped in of an evening about the time of dessert. No woman's head could have stood the powerfully intoxicating influence of that never-failing incense. In the winter-time, when the cozy drawing-room was bright with the light of wax-candles, she saw it filled with the wealthiest men in the place, who repaid her in compliments for delicate liqueurs and exquisite wines from "dear

* On the iron bar across the fire-grate which supports the cooking utensils.

mistress' " cellars. The friends of the house and their wives had, to all intents and purposes, the usufruct of this luxury, while they economized in fuel and candle-light. For which reasons it was proclaimed for five leagues round about, nay, at Ville-aux-Fayes itself, when the notables of the department were passed in review, that " Mme. Soudry makes an admirable hostess; she keeps open house, and it is a wonderfully pleasant place. She understands how to live up to her fortune. She can enjoy a joke. And what handsome plate! There is not such another house out of Paris!"

Bouret had given that plate to Mlle. Laguerre. It was a splendid service, the work of the great Germain, and, in plain language, La Soudry had stolen it; when Mlle. Laguerre died, the woman simply took it up to her own room, and the next-of-kin, who knew nothing about their property, could never put in a claim for missing items.

For some little time it had been the fashion among the twelve or fifteen persons of whom the "best society" in Soulanges was composed to speak of Mme. Soudry as of an "intimate friend of Mlle. Laguerre," and to fight shy of the word "waiting-woman." To hear them talk, La Cochet might have sacrificed herself by becoming the great actress' companion.

Strange, but true it is, that all these confirmed illusions spread and grew in Madame Soudry, till they invaded the reality-requiring region of the heart. She ruled her husband despotically.

The gendarme being constrained to show fondness for a wife, older than himself by ten years, who kept the purse-strings in her own hands, encouraged her in the notions which she entertained of her beauty. Nevertheless, at times, when this one or that envied him his good fortune, he would wish that they could exchange places with him; and he was at as great pains to hide his peccadilloes as if a young and idolized wife were in the case. Only within the last few days had he

contrived to introduce a pretty housemaid into the establishment.

Does the portrait of the queen of Soulanges seem to be something of a caricature? The type might still be found here and there in the provinces in those days, among women on the outskirts of nobility or the higher regions of finance; witness the widow of a farmer-general in Touraine, who still applied fillets of veal to her face in the interests of her complexion. But the present portrait, painted to the life though it is, is incomplete without its setting of brilliants, and the queen's principal courtiers must be sketched, were it only to explain how formidable such Lilliputians may become, and to throw light upon the dissemination of opinion in out-of-the-way places.

Lest any should be deceived, it may be said that there are places like Soulanges which cannot be described as either city, town, or village, yet partake of the nature of all three. In such places the faces of the people are quite different from those which you shall see in the heart of our good, overgrown, dirty provincial cities; for the townsman is half a countryman, and this blend produces some of the queerest of queer characters.

Mme. Soudry disposed of, Notary Lupin, steward of the manor of Soulanges, ranks second in importance; for it is scarcely worth while to mention old Gendrin-Vattebled, the crown agent of woods and forests, a nonagenarian on the brink of the grave, who had never left his house since the advent of Mme. Soudry. Gendrin-Vattebled had reigned over Soulanges in his quality of a man who had held the same post since the time of Louis XV., and in his lucid intervals he still spoke of the jurisdiction of the *Tables des Marbre* (Tables of stone).

Five-and-forty springs had bloomed for Lupin, but he was still fresh and pink-complexioned, thanks to the full habit of body which grows inevitably upon a man of sedentary life; he still sang his ballad, and wore the elegant costume of the

drawing-room performer. In his carefully varnished shoes and vest of brimstone-yellow, his tight coats, rich silk stocks, and trousers in the latest fashion, Lupin looked almost like a Parisian. He had his hair curled by the hairdresser, who fulfilled the functions of the "Gazette" in Soulanges, and altogether lived up to the character of lady-killer, earned by an intimacy with Mme. Money-Sarcus; for, to compare small things with great, that conquest had been in his life pretty much what the Campaigns of Italy were in the career of Napoleon. Lupin was the only one of the circle who went to Paris, where he paid visits to the Soulanges family in town. He had only to open his mouth, and the supremacy of his sway exercised in his double character of coxcomb and man-of-taste was at once apparent. He pronounced judgment on all things by three words, the positive, comparative, and superlative of dispraise—*rusty*, *out-of-date*, and *obsolete*.

A man or a woman or a piece of furniture might be "rusty;" then, to mark the comparative degree of futility, "out-of-date;" and finally, by way of superlative and third term, "obsolete." *Obsolete!* 'twas the critic's "dead-and-done-with," the domdaniel of contempt. Mere "rust" might be rubbed off; "out-of-date" was past praying for; but "*obsolete!*" oh, better never to have issued from nothingness!

For praise, Lupin was reduced to the word "charming," redoubled if required. "Charming!"—that was the positive term of admiration. "Charming! charming!"—you might set your mind at rest. "Charming! charming! charming!" —you might throw down the ladder, for the heaven of perfection had been scaled.

This scrivener—he was wont to speak of himself as the scrivener, quill-driver, and petty attorney, jestingly putting himself above his calling—this scrivener carried on a flirtation with the mayoress, who felt a certain weakness for Lupin, although he had fair hair and wore spectacles, and La Cochet

had always admired dark men with mustaches, and tufts upon their finger-joints—the Hercules type, in short. But now she made an exception in Lupin's favor, on account of his elegance, feeling, beside, that her social triumph in Soulanges would be incomplete without an adorer; though as yet, to Soudry's disgust, none of the queen's adorers had dared to overstep the limits of respectful homage.

Lupin was a baritone, somewhat given to sample-singing in corners or upon the terrace, by way of reminding the world of his social gift, a reef upon which the socially-gifted and, alas! sometimes even men of genius are apt to make shipwreck.

He had married an heiress in sabots and blue stockings, the only daughter of a salt merchant who made his fortune during the Revolution, when the reaction against the *gabelle* (salt duties) put enormous sums into the pockets of salt smugglers. Lupin prudently kept his wife in the background, and Bébelle was sustained by a platonic passion for his very handsome head-clerk, one Bonnac, who had nothing but his salary, and played upon a lower stage the part taken by his employer in the "best society."

Madame Lupin's education had been prodigiously neglected. She only appeared in public on state occasions, in the form of an enormous tun of Burgundy draped with velvet, and surmounted by a little head deeply sunk in a pair of shoulders of uncertain hue. By no effort could her girdle be induced to stay in its natural place, and Bébelle candidly admitted that prudence forbade her to wear corsets. It would have outtasked the imagination of a poet, nay, of an inventor, to discover in Bébelle's back any trace of the bewitching curves of the vertebral outline of any woman who is a woman.

Bébelle, as round as a tortoise, belonged to some invertebrate feminine order. Her appalling development of cellular tissue must, however, have been not a little reassuring for Lupin whenever he thought of the portly Bébelle's little fancy

—for "Bébelle" he unblushingly called her, and nobody thought of laughing.

"What do you call your wife?" Money-Sarcus inquired one day. He could not digest the "out-of-date" applied to a new piece of furniture which he had bought as a bargain.

"My wife, unlike yours, is still undefined," retorted Lupin.

A subtle brain lurked beneath Lupin's coarse exterior; he had the sense to hold his tongue about wealth at least as considerable as Rigou's fortune.

"Young Lupin," Amaury Lupin, was an affliction to his parent. He refused to follow the paternal calling, he became one of the Don Juans of the valley, and abused the privileges of an only son by enormous drains on the cash-box; yet he never exceeded his father's indulgence, for after each fresh escapade Lupin senior remarked, "After all, I was just the same in my time." Amaury never went near Mme. Soudry, who "plagued him" (*sic*). Some memory had inspired the waiting-woman with the notion of "forming" a young man who sought his pleasures in the billiard-room at the Café of Peace. Amaury Lupin frequented low company, and even the society of such as Bonnébault. He was having his fling (as Mme. Soudry put it), and his one answer to his father's remonstrances was the cry of "Send me to Paris, I am tired of this!"

Lupin's fate, alas! was that of most bucks, a quasi-conjugal entanglement. It was well known that he was passionately attached to Mme. Euphémie Plissoud, whose husband was Brunet's fellow-clerk of the peace, and that he had no secrets from her. The fair Euphémie, the daughter of Wattebled the grocer, reigned, like Mme. Soudry, in a lower social sphere. Plissoud, who was understood to authorize his wife's conduct, was despised on this account by the "best society," and regarded as second-rate.

If Lupin was the vocalist, Dr. Gourdon was the man of science in the "best society." It was said of him that: "We

have here a man of science of the first rank;" and Mme. Soudry, a competent critic in matters musical (in that she had announced Messieurs Gluck and Piccini when they came to call of a morning upon her mistress, and had dressed Mlle. Laguerre at the opera at night)—Mme. Soudry, who had persuaded every one, including Lupin himself, that he would have made a fortune with that voice, would deplore the fact that the doctor had given none of his ideas to the world.

Dr. Gourdon, who took all his ideas straight from Buffon and Cuvier, could scarcely have set himself up for a man of science in the eyes of Soulanges with such an outfit, but he was making a collection of shells and a *hortus siccus* (collection of dried plants), and could stuff birds to boot—in fact, he coveted the distinction of leaving a Natural History Museum to the town, and on these grounds he was accepted all over the department as a second Buffon.

In appearance Dr. Gourdon was not unlike a Genevese banker. He had the same air of pedantry, the same chilly manner and puritanical neatness; but in his case the money, like the business shrewdness, had been omitted. He was wont to exhibit with exceeding complacency his famous natural history collection, comprising a stuffed bear and a marmot (deceased on their passage through the town), a very complete collection of the local rodents: shrew-mice, field-mice, house-mice, rats, and the like, together with all the rare birds shot in that part of Burgundy, and conspicuous among these last an Alpine eagle caught among the Jura. Gourdon also possessed a good many specimens of *lepidoptera*—a word which raised hopes of monstrosities, so that the reality was usually greeted with: "Why, they are butterflies!"—a very pretty collection of fossil shells, which for the most part had come to him by way of bequest; and, to conclude the list, a quantity of specimens of the minerals of the Jura and Burgundy.

The whole second floor of Dr. Gourdon's house was occupied by these treasures which were established behind glass

doors in cupboards, above rows of drawers full of insects. Nor did they fail to produce a certain impression, due partly to the eccentricities of the labels, partly to the magic charm of color, and partly also to the vast number of objects which no one notices out of doors, though they become wonderful as soon as they are set behind a sheet of glass. There was a day set apart for going to see Dr. Gourdon's collection.

"I have five hundred ornithological specimens," he would announce to the curious, "two hundred mammals, five thousand insects, three thousand shells, and seven hundred specimen minerals."

"What patience you must have had!" the ladies would exclaim, and Gourdon would reply, "A man ought to do something for his native place."

Gourdon's vanity drew a prodigious toll from his dead beasts and birds by the remark, "All this has been left to the town in my will;" and how his visitors admired his "philanthropy!" They talked of devoting the whole second floor of the town hall (after the doctor's death) to the housing of the Gourdon Museum.

"I count on the gratitude of my fellow-townsmen to associate my name with my collection," he would say in reply to this suggestion, "for I do not dare to hope that they will set my bust there in marble——"

"Why, surely that would be the least that they could do for you!" would be the answer; "are you not the glory of Soulanges?" And in the end the man came to look upon himself as one of the great men of Burgundy.

The safest investments are not the public funds, but those which are inscribed in the name of self-love, and the learned naturalist, on Lupin's grammatical system, might be described as a "happy, happy, happy man!"

Gourdon, his brother, the registrar of the court, was a little ferret-faced man. All his features seemed to have crowded themselves together in the neighborhood of his neck, in such

a sort that his nose was a kind of starting-point whence the various lines of forehead, cheek, and mouth went their various ways, much as all the ravines on a mountain side begin at its summit. He was one of the great poets of Burgundy, a second Piron, so it was said. The double merit of the brothers attracted notice in the chief town of the department.

"We have the two brothers Gourdon at Soulanges," it was said; "two very remarkable men, men who would more than hold their own in Paris."

The poet was an exceedingly dexterous player at cup-and-ball, a mania which bred another mania, for it inspired him with the idea of celebrating in verse a game which had so great a vogue in the eighteenth century. (The manias of Mediocracy are apt to appear in pairs.) Gourdon junior was delivered of his poem during the time of Napoleon, so it is needless to mention the sound and sensible school to which he belonged. Luce de Lancival, Parny, Saint-Lambert, Roucher, Vigée, Andrieux, and Berchoux were his heroes, and Delille was his idol until the day when the best society in Soulanges raised the question whether Gourdon did not surpass Delille. From that time forth the registrar spoke of his model as "Monsieur l'Abbé Delille" with unnecessary courtesy.

Poems achieved between the years 1780 and 1814 were all modeled on the same pattern; and the great poem on the *bilboquet*, or cup-and-ball, may be taken as a representative specimen. Boileau's "Lutrin" is the Saturn of a whole abortive progeny of playful pieces, most of them limited to four cantos, for it was generally recognized that the subject-matter was apt to grow thin in six.

Gourdon's poem on the cup-and-ball—the *Bilboquéide*—obeyed the rules of poetical composition invariably observed in such cases, for all these departmental compositions are made from the same pattern. The first canto describes the subject of the poem, and begins, like Gourdon's effort, with an invocation much on this wise:

"I sing the Sport which suits with every Age
The Small and Great, the Simple and the Sage;
When our deft Hand the boxwood Spike extends
To catch the transpierced Globe as it descends,
Delightful Pastime, sovran cure for Spleen,
If Palamedes had this Toy foreseen,
How had he longed another Wreath to claim,
And envied us the invention of the Game!
Muse of the Loves of Laughter and of Glee,
Descend upon my roof and visit me,
A votary of Themis striving still
Official paper with my Rhymes to fill,
Descend and charm." . .

Then followed a description of the game itself, and of the most elegant *bilboquets* known to history, an account of the part they played in the prosperity of the Green Monkey and other toystores, a digression touching statistics in this connection, and finally Gourdon brought his first canto to an end with three lines which recall the conclusion of every similar production—

"Thus do the Arts, nay, even Science's self,
Taking the Object into their employ,
Turn to their profit Pleasure's trifling Toy."

The second canto (as usual) described divers manners of using the "object" and the ways in which it might serve its owner in society and with the fair sex. It will suffice to quote a single passage in which the player goes through his exercises beneath the eyes of the "beloved object," and the rest may be left to the imaginations of amateurs of this serious literature—

"Watch yonder Player 'mid the gazers all,
His eye fixed fondly on the iv'ry Ball,
How heedfully he spies with caution nice
Its Movement in parabola precise.
Thrice has the Globe described its curve complete,
He lays his Triumph at his Idol's feet,

When lo!—the Disc its destiny has missed,
And hits the careless Player on the fist!
He lifts his martyred digits to his lips,
A flying Kiss consoles his Finger-tips.
How canst thou, Ingrate, of thy luck complain?
A smile o'erpays thee for the trifling pain."

It was this piece of description (worthy of Virgil) which raised the question whether Gourdon had not surpassed Delille. The matter-of-fact Brunet objected to the word *disc*, which provided society with matter for discussion during the best part of a twelvemonth. But one evening, when both sides had argued themselves red in the face, Dr. Gourdon, the man of science, completely crushed the *antidisc-ites*.

"The moon," said he, "styled a 'disc' by the poets, is a globe."

"How do you know?" retorted Brunet. "We have never seen the other side of it."

The third canto contained the inevitable anecdote, a story of a famous minister of Louis XVI., which everbody knows by heart; but, to quote the formula hallowed by constant use in the "Débats" between 1810 and 1814, "it had borrowed novel graces from poesy and from the charm which the author had infused into his verse."

The fourth canto, which summed up the work, concluded with the following audacious lines of the kind written for private circulation from 1810 to 1814; lines which first saw the light in 1824, after the death of Napoleon:

"Thus have I dared to sing 'mid War's alarms,
Ah! would that Monarchs bore no other Arms,
Ah! would that Nations in their Hours of ease
Beguiled the time with Pleasures such as these!
To Burgundy, too long, alas! forlorn,
Saturn's and Rhea's days again were born."

These elegant verses were incorporated in the first and only

edition, the *editio princeps*, which issued from the press of Bournier, the printer at Ville-aux-Fayes.

One hundred subscribers, by an offering of three francs apiece, insured immortality to the poem, and established a dangerous precedent; and this was the more handsome of them, for that every one of the subscribers had heard every line of the verses a hundred times.

Mme. Soudry had but recently suppressed the cup-and-ball which used to lie on a console table in her drawing-room, a pretext for frequent quotations; she found out at last that she had a rival in the toy.

As for the poet himself, who bragged of his works in manuscript, it will be a sufficient description of him to record the way in which he announced to the "best society" of Soulanges that a rival poet had appeared.

"Have you heard the strange news?" he had said (two years before the story begins). "There is *another* poet in Burgundy. Yes," he went on, seeing the astonishment expressed in all faces, "he comes from Mâcon. But you would never imagine what he is at work upon. He is putting the clouds into rhyme——"

"They did very well, left *blank*," said Mons. Guerbet the punster.

"It is the queerest rigmarole! Lakes and stars and billows! Not a single rational image, not a trace of didactic intention; he is ignorant of the very sources of poetry. He calls the sky by its proper name; he calls the moon, the moon, plump and plain, instead of calling it the 'orb of night!' See what lengths you may go by straining after originality!" cried Gourdon dolorously. "Poor young fellow! A born Burgundian, and he takes to singing the praise of water, it makes you sorry to see it! If he had but come and consulted *me*, I would have given him the finest subject in the world, a poem on wine—'The Bacchiad'—which I myself feel too old to undertake now."

The great poet* is still ignorant of his greatest triumph (due, it is true, to his Burgundian extraction). He was once the talk of Soulanges, where the very names of the modern *Pléiade* were unknown.

Scores of Gourdons lived and sang under the Empire, which some have blamed, forsooth, for the neglect of letters! Turn to your booksellers' catalogues, and behold poem after poem on the Turning-lathe, the Game of Draughts, Backgammon, Geography, Typography, Comedy, and what not, to say nothing of masterpieces so much cried up as Delille on Pity, Imagination, and Conversation; or Berchoux on Gastronomy, *Dansomanie*, and the like. Very probably in another fifty years readers will laugh at our thousand and one poems, modeled on the "Méditations" and "Orientales." Who can foresee the changes of taste, the caprices of fashion, the transformations of man's mind? Each generation sweeps away all before it, even down to the traces of the idols which it finds upon its way; each generation sets up new gods to be worshiped and thrown down in turn by the next.

Sarcus, a nice, little, dappled-gray, elderly man, divided his time between Themis and Flora—which is to say, between the court and his hothouse. For the past twelve years he had been meditating a book to be entitled "The History of the Institution of Justices of the Peace." The political and judicial aspects of these functionaries, he was wont to observe, had already undergone several changes. Justices of the peace existed in virtue of the Code of Brumaire of the year IV.,† but an office so important, so invaluable to the country, had lost its prestige, because the emoluments attached to an appointment which ought to be made for life were out of all proportion to the dignity of the office. It was laid to Sarcus' charge that he was a freethinker; and he was considered to be the politician of the set, which, in plain language, as you will guess, means that he was the most tiresome person in it.

* Lamartine. † Of the Republic.

He was said "to talk like a book." Gaubertin promised him the cross of the Legion of Honor, but postponed fulfillment until the day when he (Gaubertin) should succeed Leclercq and take his seat in the Centre Left.

Guerbet, the local wit and receiver of taxes, was a stout, heavy man, with a butter face, a false *toupet* (fore-lock of hair), and gold rings in the ears, which lived in a state of continual friction with his shirt collar. Guerbet dabbled in pomology. He prided himself on the possession of the finest fruit-trees in the district; he forced early vegetables, which appeared about a month after their advent in Paris, and grew the most tropical products in his hotbeds; pine-apples, to wit, and nectarines, and green peas; and when a pottle of strawberries was sold at ten sous in Paris, he would bring Mme. Soudry a handful with no little pride.

In M. Vermut, the druggist, Soulanges possessed a chemist who had a little more right to his title than Sarcus the statesman, or Lupin the singer, or Gourdon senior, the man of science, or his brother the poet. Yet the best society of Soulanges held Vermut rather cheap, and beyond that society he was not known at all. Perhaps the circle felt instinctively the real superiority of the thinker among them who never said a word and listened to nonsense with a satirical smile; so they threw doubts on his learning, and questioned it *sotto voce*. Outside the circle no one troubled their heads about it.

Vermut was the butt of Mme. Soudry's salon. No society is complete without a victim; there must be somebody to compassionate, and banter, and patronize, and scorn. In the first place, Vermut, with his head full of scientific problems, used to come to the house with his cravat untied and his vest unfastened, and wore a green jacket, usually stained. Furthermore, he was a fair mark for jokes on account of a countenance so babyish that old Guerbet used to say that he had taken it from his patients. In places behind the times like Soulanges, country apothecaries are still employed as they used to be in

the days when Pourceaugnac fell a victim to a practical joke; and these respectable practitioners, the better to establish their calling, demand an indemnity of displacement.

The little man, endowed with the patience of a chemist, could not "enjoy" his wife, to use a provincialism which signifies the abolition of the marital rule. Mme. Vermut, a charming, lively woman, a woman of spirit moreover, who could lose two whole francs at cards without a word, railed at her spouse, pursued him with epigrams, and held him up for an idiot only fit to distill dullness. She was one of those women whose mission it is to keep a little town lively; she was the salt of this corner of the earth, kitchen-salt, it is true, but what salt it was! She indulged in boisterous jokes, but these were overlooked. She thought nothing of telling M. Taupin, a white-haired man of seventy, to "shut up, monkey!"

The miller of Soulanges had fifty thousand francs a year and an only daughter, whom Lupin had in his mind for Amaury, for he had given up all hope by this time of Mlle. Gaubertin, and President Gaubertin thought of the same girl for his own son, the registrar of mortgages. Here again interests clashed. This miller, a Sarcus-Taupin, was the Nucingen of the town. He was said to have three million francs, but he would not join any combination. He thought of nothing but his flour-mill and of how to get all the trade into his own hands, and was chiefly remarkable for the signal absence of courtesy or civility in his manner.

Old Guerbet, the brother of the postmaster at Conches, had about ten thousand francs a year of his own beside his professional income. The Gourdons were well-to-do men. The doctor had married the only daughter of the very old M. Gendrin-Vattebled, crown agent of woods and forests, who could not be expected to last much longer; while the registrar had wedded the Abbé Taupin's niece and sole heiress. The Abbé Taupin, curé of Soulanges, was a fat priest, ensconced in his living like a rat in a cheese.

The pliant ecclesiastic was very popular in Soulanges; he was quite at home in the best society, kindly and good-natured with the "second-rate," and apostolic with the unfortunate. Cousin to the miller, and related to both the Sarcus families, he belonged to the district, and was part of the system of Mediocracy. Taupin was thrifty, never dined at home, went to weddings and came away before the dancing began, and never meddled with politics; he demanded and obtained outward conformity to the requirements of religion, urging his pleas "in my professional capacity." And he was allowed to have his way. "We have a good curé," people used to say of him. The bishop, who knew Soulanges well, was not deceived as to the merit of the ecclesiastic; but it was something to find a man who could induce such a town to accept the forms of religion, a man who could fill the church of a Sunday and preach a sermon to a slumbering congregation.

The Gourdons' ladies—for at Soulanges, as in Dresden and some other German capitals, those who move in the best society greet each other with the inquiry, "How is your lady?" and people say, "He was not there with his lady," or "I saw his lady and the young ladies." A Parisian who should say "his wife" or "womenkind" would create a sensation and be set down for a man of the worst style. At Soulanges, as at Geneva, Dresden, and Brussels, these words are never used; Brussels storekeepers may put "wife of such an one" above their store-doors, but at Soulanges "your good lady" is the only permissible formula. To resume—the Gourdons' ladies can only be compared to the luckless supernumeraries of second-rate theatres known to Parisian audiences, who frequently take the *artistes* for a laughing-stock; it will suffice to say that they belonged to the order of "nice little things," and their portraits will be complete, for the most unlettered bourgeois can look about him and find examples of these necessary beings.

It is scarcely worth while to remark that Guerbet under-

stood finance admirably well, and that Soudry would have made a minister of war, for every worthy townsman was equipped with the imagined specialty necessary to the existence of a provincial; and not only so, each one was free to cultivate his own private plot in the domain of human vanity without fear of rivalry or disturbance from his neighbor.

If Cuvier, traveling incognito, had passed through the town, the best society of Soulanges would have felt convinced that his knowledge was a mere trifle compared with Dr. Gourdon's scientific attainments. Nourrit and his "fine thread of voice," as the notary called it with patronizing indulgence, would have been thought scarce worthy to accompany the nightingale of Soulanges; and as for the versifier whose works were just passing through Bournier's press, it was incredible that a poet of equal merit should be found in Paris now that Delille was dead.

This provincial bourgeoisie, in its sleek self-satisfaction, could take precedence of all social superiority. Only those who have spent some portion of their lives in a small country town of this kind can form any idea of the exceeding complacency which overspreads the countenances of these folk who took themselves for the cœliac plexus of France. Gifted as they were with incredible perverse ingenuity, they had decided in their wisdom that one of the heroes of Essling was a coward, Mme. de Montcornet a woman of scandalous life, and the Abbé Brossette a petty intriguer, and within a fortnight of the purchase of the Aigues they discovered the general's origin, and dubbed him the "Upholsterer."

If Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin had all of them lived at Ville-aux-Fayes, there would have been a quarrel; their pretensions must inevitably have come into collision; but Fate ordained that the Lucullus of Blangy should feel that solitude was a necessity if he was to combine usury and sensuality in peace; while Mme. Soudry had sense enough to see that she could only reign in such a place as Soulanges, and Gaubertin

found Ville-aux-Fayes a central position for his business. Those who find amusement in the study of social intricacies will admit that Montcornet had a run of ill luck when he fell among such foes, all living sufficiently far apart to revolve in their separate spheres of power and vanity. The malignant planets were but ten times the more potent for mischief because they never crossed each other's paths.

Yet, though the worthy Soulangeois were proud of their leisurely lives, and regarded their society as distinctly more agreeable than that of Ville-aux-Fayes, repeating with ludicrous pomposity that "Soulanges is the place for pleasure and society" (a saying current in the valley), it would scarcely be prudent to suppose that Ville-aux-Fayes admitted this supremacy. The Gaubertin salon laughed in its sleeve at the Soudry salon. Gaubertin would say: "Ours is a busy town, a great business place, and some of us are fools enough to plague ourselves with money-making," and from his manner it was easy to discern a slight antagonism between the earth and the moon. The moon believed that she was useful to the earth, and the earth controlled the moon.

Both earth and moon lived, however, on terms of the closest intimacy. At Carnival-tide the best society of Soulanges went in a body to the four dances given in turn by Gaubertin, Gendrin, Leclercq, and Soudry junior, the public prosecutor. Every Sunday the public prosecutor and his wife, with M., Mme., and Mlle. Elise Gaubertin, came over to Soulanges to dine with the Soudrys. When the sub-prefect was invited, and the postmaster, Guerbet from Conches, came to take pot-luck, Soulanges beheld the spectacle of four official carriages stopping the way before the Soudry mansion.

II.

THE QUEEN'S DRAWING-ROOM.

Rigou timed his arrival for half-past five, knowing that he should find every one at his post at that hour. The mayor, like everybody else in the town, dined at three o'clock, following the eighteenth-century usage; so from five till nine in the evening the Soulanges notables exchanged news, delivered political speeches, commented on all the gossip of the valley, and discussed the doings of the folk at the Aigues. This last topic found them in conversation for an hour daily. Every one made a point of learning something on that head, and it was well known beside that to bring news of the Aigues was a way of recommending yourself to your host and hostess.

After this indispensable review of things in general, the company betook themselves to boston, the only game which the queen could play. The stout old Guerbert would mimic Madame Isaure (Gaubertin's wife), ridiculing her finical airs, her thin voice, prim mouth, and missish manners; the Curé Taupin would retail some bit of news from Ville-aux-Fayes; Mme. Soudry was saturated with fulsome compliments; and then came the final, "We have had a delightful game of boston."

Rigou was too selfish to take the trouble to come a distance of twelve kilometres to hear the trash talked in Mme. Soudry's drawing-room, and to see a monkey masquerading as an elderly woman. He was greatly the superior of the company by ability and education, and never showed himself in Soulanges save on the rare occasions when he went thither to consult his notary, Lupin. Rigou was not expected to be neighborly; his habits and business occupations absolved him; and his health (he said) did not permit him to return

at night along the road by the river, when "the damp was rising" from the Thune.

The tall, gaunt usurer, moreover, overawed Mme. Soudry's drawing-room. Instinctively it was felt that in this man there was a tiger with claws of steel; that the malignance of a savage was combined with the wisdom implanted in the cloister and matured by the sun of gold, wisdom in which Gaubertin had never willingly trusted.

Urbain, Soudry's man, sitting on a bench under the dining-room windows, looked up and saw the little basket-chaise as it passed the Café of Peace. He shaded his eyes to watch it, while he chatted with Socquard the saloon-keeper.

"That is old Rigou! The gate will have to be opened. You hold his horse, Socquard," he said familiarly. Urbain had been in a cavalry regiment, and when he failed to obtain a transfer into the gendarmerie he took service with Soudry instead. He now went in to open the great gate into the courtyard.

The great Socquard, as you see, was paying an informal call; but so it is with many illustrious personages, they condescend to walk, and sneeze, and eat, and sleep for all the world like ordinary mortals.

Socquard was by birth a Hercules. He could carry eleven hundredweight, he could break a man's back with one blow of his fist, twist an iron bar, or stop a cart with a horse harnessed to it. He was the Milo of Crotona of the valley, his fame spread all over the department, and absurd fables were told of him, as of most celebrities. It was said, for instance, in the Morvan that one day he picked up a poor woman, donkey, and bundles, and all, and carried her to market, that he had eaten an ox at a sitting, and drunk a quarter-cask of wine in a day, and the like. Socquard, a short, thickset man with a placid countenance, was as meek as any maid; he was broad in the shoulders and deep-chested; and, though his lungs heaved like the bellows in a smithy, his voice was so

thin and clear that it startled any one who heard it for the first time.

Like Tonsard, whose reputation for ferocity saved him the trouble of giving proof of it, like every man who is hedged about by a reputation of any kind, Socquard never displayed his triumphant powers, except at the particular request and prayer of his friends. Just now he held the horse's head while the public prosecutor's father-in-law dismounted and turned to apply himself to the flight of steps.

"All well at home, Monsieur Rigou?" inquired the illustrious Socquard.

"Pretty well, old chap," returned Rigou. "And are Plissoud and Bonnébault, Viollet, and Amaury still the props of your establishment?"

This inquiry, apparently prompted by a good-natured interest, was no random question flung down by a superior to an inferior. When Rigou had nothing else to do, he thought over every trifle, and Fourchon had already pointed out that there was something suspicious in an intimacy between Bonnébault, Plissoud, and Corporal Viollet.

For a few francs lost at play, Bonnébault was quite capable of selling the peasants' secrets to the corporal; or two or three extra bowls of punch might set him babbling when he did not know the importance of his maudlin utterances. But, on the other hand, the old otter-hunter's information might have been counseled by thirst, and Rigou would have paid no attention to it save for the mention of Plissoud. Plissoud was in a position which might inspire him with a notion of thwarting the Aigues conspiracy, if it were merely to make something for himself out of either side.

Plissoud, the clerk of the court, eked out his income with various unremunerative occupations; he was a life insurance agent (these companies having just been started in France), agent likewise for a society which insured against the chances of conscription; but an unfortunate predilection for billiards

and spiced wine was the principal obstacle in his way to fortune. Like Fourchon, he cultivated the art of doing nothing, and waited for a problematical fortune to turn up. Plissoud hated the "best society" of Soulanges profoundly, having measured its power, and Plissoud knew all the ins and outs of Gaubertin's bourgeois tyranny. He scoffed at the moneyed men of Soulanges and Ville-aux-Fayes, and represented the Opposition in a minority of one. As he had neither cash nor credit, he scarcely seemed to be formidable; and Brunet, only too glad to have so contemptible a rival, protected Plissoud for fear that he should sell his practice to some energetic young fellow like Bonnac, for instance, who would compel him to yield up an equal share of the business of the district.

"Business is all right, thanks to them," answered Socquard, "but my spiced wine is being imitated."

"You ought to follow the matter up," said Rigou sententiously.

"I might be led on too far," said the saloon-keeper, innocent of any jocular intention.

"And do your customers get on well together?"

"There is a row now and again; but that is only natural when they play for money."

All heads by this time were looking out of the drawing-room window; Soudry, seeing the father of his daughter-in-law, came out upon the steps to greet him.

"Well, *compère*" (boon companion or crony), cried the ex-sergeant, using the word in its old sense, "is Annette ill that you vouchsafe your presence here of an evening?"

A survival of the gendarme in the mayor prompted him to go straight to the point.

"No," said Rigou, touching the palm which Soudry held out with his own right forefinger; "there is a row on, we will have a talk about it, for our children are concerned——"

Soudry, a fine-looking man, wore a blue suit as though he

still belonged to the force, and a black stock and spurs to his boots. He took Rigou's arm and led him up to his imposing better-half.

The glass door opened on to the terrace, where the family party were walking up and down enjoying the summer evening. The imaginative reader who has read the previous sketch can picture the glory of the wonderful stretch of country below.

"It is a very long time since we last saw you, my dear Rigou," said Mme. Soudry, taking Rigou's arm to walk out upon the terrace.

"I am so troubled with indigestion," said the old money-lender. "Just look at me, my color is almost as high as yours."

Rigou's appearance on the terrace was, as might be expected, the signal for a salvo of jovial greetings.

"Epicu-rigou! I've found another name for you!" cried the receiver of taxes, holding out a hand, in which Rigou inserted a forefinger.

"Not bad! not bad!" said Sarcus, the little justice of the peace; "he is a bit of a glutton is our lord of Blangy."

"Lord of Blangy!" said Rigou bitterly; "I have not been the cock of my village this long while."

"That is not what the hens say, you rogue you!" said La Soudry, giving Rigou a playful little tap with her fan.

"Are we going on well, my dear sir?" asked the notary, bowing to his principal client.

"Pretty well," said Rigou, and again he held out a forefinger for the lawyer to take.

This habit of Rigou's, which reduced a handshake to the chilliest of demonstrations, was enough in itself to depict the man's whole character to a stranger.

"Look for a corner where we can have a quiet talk," said the monk, singling out Lupin and Mme. Soudry by a glance.

"Let us go back to the drawing-room," said the queen of

Soulanges. "These gentlemen," she added, indicating Dr Gourdon and Guerbet, "are having a discussion on the Q. T."

Mme. Soudry had asked them what they were talking about, and old Guerbet, witty as ever, had replied that they were "having a discussion on the Q. T." Mme. Soudry took this for some scientific expression, and repeated the word with a pretentious air.

"What is the latest news of the Upholsterer?" asked Soudry, and, sitting down beside his wife, he put his arm about her waist. Like most elderly women, La Soudry would forgive much for a public demonstration of affection.

"Why, he has gone to the prefecture to demand the enforcement of the penalties and to ask for support," said Rigou, lowering his voice to set an example of prudence.

"It will be the ruin of him," said Lupin, rubbing his hands. "There will be fighting!"

"Fighting!" repeated Soudry, "that is as may be. If the prefect and the general, who are friends of his, send over a squadron of horse, there will be no fighting. With the gendarmes from Soulanges they might, at a pinch, get the best of it; but as for trying to stand against a charge of cavalry!——"

"Sibilet heard him say something still more dangerous, and that brings me here," Rigou continued.

"Oh! my poor Sophie!" cried Mme. Soudry, taking a sentimental tone, "into what hands the Aigues has fallen! This is what the Revolution has done for us; it has given silk epaulettes to low ruffians! Any one might have known that if you turn a bottle upside down the dregs will come to the top and spoil the wine."

"He means to go to Paris and bring influence to bear on the keeper of the seals, so as to make sweeping changes in the court here."

"Ah!" said Lupin, "then he has seen his danger."

"If they give my son-in-law the appointment of advocate-

general, there is nothing to be said, and the Upholsterer will replace him by some Parisian of his own," Rigou continued. "If he asks for a seat in the court for Monsieur Gendrin, and has our examining magistrate, Guerbet, appointed to be president at Auxerre, he will knock down our ninepins! He has the gendarmerie for him as it is; if he has the court to boot, and has counselors like the Abbé Brossette and Michaud at his side, we shall be nowhere; he might make things very unpleasant for us."

"What! in these five years have you not managed to rid yourselves of the Abbé Brossette?" asked Lupin.

"You do not know him," returned Rigou; "he is as suspicious as a blackbird. That priest is not a man, he never looks at a woman; I cannot see that he has any passion, he is impregnable. Now the general's hot temper lays him open to attack. A man with a weakness is always the servant of his enemies when they can use the handle he gives them. The really strong are those who can keep their vices well in hand, and do not suffer themselves to be mastered by them. The peasants are all right, everything is in working order, but so far we can do nothing against the abbé. He is like Michaud. Such men are too good to live, the Almighty ought to take them to Himself."

"We ought to find them servant-girls who would put plenty of soap on their stairs," said Mme. Soudry. Rigou gave the almost imperceptible start which a very crafty man makes when he learns a new stratagem.

"The Upholsterer has another weak side; he loves his wife. We might reach him in that way——"

"Let us see," said Mme. Soudry. "We must see first if he carries out his notions."

"What?" cried Lupin; "why, there is the rub!"

"Lupin," said Rigou, taking an authoritative tone, "just go to the prefecture and see the fair Madame Sarcus this very evening. Arrange matters with her so that her husband shall

tell her all that the Upholsterer said and did at the prefecture."

"I should have to spend the night there," returned Maître Lupin.

"So much the better for Money-Sarcus, he will be the gainer," remarked Rigou, "and Madame Sarcus is not exactly 'out-of-date' yet."

"Oh! Monsieur Rigou," simpered Mme. Soudry, "is a woman ever 'out-of-date?'"

"You are right as far as that one is concerned. She does not paint before the glass," said Rigou. The exhibition of Mme. Soudry's antiquated charms always filled him with disgust.

Mme. Soudry, who firmly believed that she only wore a mere "suspicion" of rogue, did not feel the sting of the epigram, and asked: "Is it really possible that there are women who paint themselves?"

"As for you, Lupin," Rigou continued, without taking any notice of this artless speech, "go to see friend Gaubertin tomorrow morning when you come back. Tell him that I and my crony here" (slapping Soudry on the thigh) "will come and eat a crust with him, and ask him for breakfast about noon. Let him know how things are going, so that each of us may turn his ideas over in his mind, for it is a question now of making an end of that accursed Upholsterer. As I was coming here to find you, I said to myself that we must get the Upholsterer into some mess or other, so that the keeper of the seals may laugh in his face when he asks for any changes in the court at Ville-aux-Fayes——"

"Hurrah for the church!" cried Lupin, slapping Rigou on the shoulder.

An idea struck Mme. Soudry at that very moment, an idea which could only have occurred to an opera-girl's waiting-maid.

"If we could only attract the Upholsterer over to the Sou-

langes fair," said she, "and let loose some bewitchingly pretty girl upon him, he might perhaps take up with her, and we could make trouble between him with his wife; she could be told that the cabinetmaker's son had gone back to his old loves——"

"Ah! my beauty," exclaimed Soudry, "there is more sense in your head than in the whole prefecture of police at Paris!"

"'Tis an idea which proves that Madame Soudry is as much our queen by intelligence as by beauty," said Lupin, and was rewarded by a grimace which was accepted without protest as a smile by the best society of Soulanges.

"It would be better yet," said Rigou, who had remained thoughtful for some time, "if the thing might be turned to a scandal."

"To have him brought before a magistrate on a criminal charge!" cried Lupin. "Oh, that would be fine!"

"How delightful!" said Soudry artlessly, "to see, for instance, the Comte de Montcornet, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, Commander of the Order of St. Louis, and Lieutenant-General, in the Police Court on a charge of indecent——"

"He is too fond of his wife," pronounced Lupin judiciously; "he would never be made to go that length."

"That is no hindrance," said Rigou; "but there is no girl in the district that I see who is fit to turn a saint into a sinner. I am looking out for one for my abbé."

"What do you say to the beautiful Gatienne Giboulard of Auxerre? Sarcus' son has lost his head over her," suggested Lupin.

"She would be the very one," said Rigou, "only she is of no use for our purpose; she imagines that she has only to show herself to be admired; she is not wily enough. We want a minx with a head on her shoulders. It is all one, she shall come."

"Yes," said Lupin, "the more pretty girls he sees, the greater the chances."

"It will be a very difficult matter to bring the Upholsterer over to the fair. And suppose that he comes, would he go to a dancing saloon like the Tivoli?" queried the ex-sergeant.

"The reason for not going does not hold good this year, dearie," said Mme. Soudry.

"What reason, my beauty?" inquired her spouse.

"The Upholsterer wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Soulanges," said Lupin; "he was told that she was too young, and he took offense. That is the reason of the coolness between Monsieur de Soulanges and Monsieur de Montcornet, two old friends who both served in the Imperial Guard. They never see each other now. The Upholsterer did not feel inclined to meet them at the fair after that; but they are away from home this year."

As a rule, the Soulanges family spent July, August, September, and October at their country house; but at this particular time the general was in command of the artillery in Spain, under the Duc d'Angoulême, and the countess had accompanied her husband. At the siege of Cadiz the count won, as all the world knows, the marshal's baton which was given him in 1826.

So Montcornet's enemies might well believe that the Aigues would not always stand aloof at the Feast of Our Lady in August, and that it would be easy to induce the count to come to the Tivoli.

"That is so!" added Lupin. "Very well, daddy," he went on, turning to Rigou; "it rests with you to manœuvre matters so that he comes to the fair, and we will bamboozle him nicely."

The Soulanges fair on the 15th of August is one of the special attractions of the town. It is the most important fair for thirty leagues round, eclipsing even those held at the chief town of the department. Ville-aux-Fayes has no fair,

for the day of its patron, Saint Sylvester, falls at the end of December.

In August, Soulanges is full of hawkers, and from the 12th to the 15th of August two parallel lines of stalls, wooden framework booths covered with canvas, enliven the usually empty market-place. The fair and festival, which last a fortnight, is as good as a harvest for the little place. It has the authority and prestige of a tradition. Peasants leave the communes, where they are nailed down by their toil, as old Fourchon put it, to go to the fair at Soulanges. The tempting display of wares and gauds heaped up in the booths on a fair-green exercises a periodically renewed fascination over the minds of women and children and peasants all over France. It is the one great spectacle of the year.

So about the 12th of August, the mayor issued placards, countersigned Soudry, which were posted all about the district, in order to secure patronage for the salesmen, acrobats, and prodigies of all kinds, by announcing the duration of the fair and enumerating its principal attractions. These placards, the subject of La Tonsard's inquiries, always ended with the same formula—

"*The Tivoli will be illuminated with colored lamps.*"

The town of Soulanges had, in fact, adopted the flinty garden of the Café Tivoli as its public ballroom. Soulanges is built upon a rock, and almost all the soil for its gardens is imported.

The stony nature of the soil determines the peculiar flavor of the wine of the district, which is never met with except in the department. Soulanges produces a dry, white, liqueur-like wine, something like Madeira, Vouvray, or Johannisberg, those three *crus* with a strong family resemblance.

Socquard's ball made a prodigious impression on the native imagination, and the whole valley took a pride in its Tivoli.

Those who had ventured so far away as Paris said that the Tivoli there was no finer, and only rather larger than the Tivoli of Soulanges; and as for Gaubertin, he boldly avowed that he preferred Socquard's ball to the ball at Paris.

"Let us think all these things over," said Rigou. "That Parisian newspaper editor will very soon weary of his amusements, and, by means of the servants, we might induce the whole party to come over. I will bear the matter in mind. Sibilet (though his credit is falling shockingly low) might put it into his master's head that this would be a way to curry favor with the multitude."

"Just find out if the fair countess is cruel to monsieur," said Lupin, for Rigou's benefit. "The trick we are to play off upon him at the Tivoli altogether depends on that."

"That little woman is too much of a Parisienne not to know how to hold with the hare and run with the hounds," said Mme. Soudry.

"Fourchon set his granddaughter Catherine Tonsard on Charles at the Aigues, the Upholsterer's second footman; we shall soon have a pair of ears in the rooms there," said Rigou.

"Are you sure of the Abbé Taupin," he added, as he saw the curé enter the room.

"He and the Abbé Moucheron are as much ours as Soudry is mine," said Mme. Soudry, stroking her husband's chin, with—"And you are not unhappy, are you, pet?"

"I am counting upon them for a scheme for involving that hypocrite Brossette in a mess," said Rigou in a whisper, as he rose to his feet, "but I am not sure that the fellow-feeling of the cloth will not be too strong for patriotism. You do not know how strong it is. I, for instance, am no fool, but I will not answer for myself if I fall ill. I shall make my peace with the church no doubt."

"Permit us to hope so," said the curé, for whose benefit Rigou had raised his voice.

"Alas!" said Rigou, "the blunder which I made by my

marriage stands in the way of the reconciliation; I cannot murder Madame Rigou."

"Meanwhile, let us think of the Aigues," said Madame Soudry.

"Yes," replied the Benedictine. "Do you know, I think that our crony yonder at Ville-aux-Fayes is more than a match for us? It is in my mind that Gaubertin means to have the Aigues to himself, and that he will take us in," added the cunning Rigou.

On his way to Soulanges he had tapped various dark recesses of the plot with the baton of prudence, and Gaubertin's portion of it rang hollow.

"Why, the Aigues is not to belong to one, but to all three of us," cried Soudry; "the house must be pulled down from top to bottom."

"I should not be surprised to find a hoard of gold in it, which is all the more reason for pulling it down," said Rigou cunningly.

"Pooh!"

"Yes. During the wars in old times, when the seigneurs were often besieged and surprised, they used to bury their money where they could find it again; and you know that the Marquis of Soulanges-Hautemer, in whom the younger branch expired, was one of the victims of the Biron conspiracy. The lands were confiscated and given to the Comtesse de Moret."

"What a thing it is to know the history of France!" said Soudry. "You are right. It is time that we came to an understanding with Gaubertin."

"And if he tries to play fast and loose," added Rigou, "we will see about putting him in a stew."

"He is rich enough to be honest," remarked Lupin.

"I would answer for him as I would for myself; there is not an honester man in the kingdom," said Mme. Soudry.

"Oh, we believe in his honesty," Rigou began, "but between friends there should be no oversights. By-the-by, I

suspect somebody in Soulanges of trying to put a spoke in our wheel."

"And whom?" inquired Soudry.

"Plissoud."

"*Plissoud!*" cried Soudry, "a poor stick! Brunet has him by the leg, and his wife keeps his head in the manger. You ask Lupin!"

"What can he do?" asked Lupin.

"He means to open Montcornet's eyes," said Rigou; "he means to use Montcornet's influence to get himself a place——"

"It would never bring him in as much as his wife does at Soulanges," said Mme. Soudry.

"He tells his wife everything when he is drunk," remarked Lupin; "we should know in time."

"The fair Madame Plissoud has no secrets from *you*," said Rigou in reply to this; "we can be easy, never mind."

"Beside," said Mme. Soudry, "she is as stupid as she is handsome. I would not change places with her. If I were a man, I should prefer a woman who was plain, but clever, to a pretty woman who could not say 'Two.'"

The notary bit his lips. "Oh! she can set other people saying 'Three,'" said he.

"Coxcomb!" called Rigou, on his way to the door.

"Well," said Soudry, as he went out with his crony, "we shall meet again early to-morrow morning."

"I will call for you. Oh! by-the-by, Lupin," he added, turning to the notary, who had left the room to order his horse, "try to find out through Madame Sarcus anything that our Upholsterer may contrive against us at the prefecture."

"If she cannot find out, who will?" asked Lupin.

Rigou looked at Lupin with a knowing smile. "Pardon me," he said, "they are such a lot of noodles in there that I was forgetting that there was one really clever man among them."

"Indeed, I wonder myself how it is that I have not grown rusty," said Lupin artlessly.

"Is it true that Soudry has engaged a housemaid?"

"Why, yes," said Lupin, "a week ago. His worship the mayor had a mind to bring out his wife's merits by force of contrast with a little chit of a Burgundian peasant, the age of an old ox. How he manages with Madame Soudry we cannot guess as yet, for he has the impudence to go very early to bed."

"I will see into that to-morrow," said the village Sardanapalus, forcing a smile, and with that the two profound schemers shook hands and parted.

Rigou, cautious soul, had no wish to be benighted on his way home, in spite of his new-born popularity. "Get along, citizen!" he called to his horse, a joke which this son of the Revolution never forgot to cut at the expense of the Revolution. The bitterest reactionaries are always to be found among those raised on high by a popular upheaval.

"Old Rigou pays short visits," said Gourdon the registrar, addressing Mme. Soudry.

"Short but sweet," the lady replied.

"Like his life," said the doctor, "that man is immoderate in all things."

"So much the better," said Soudry. "My son will come into his property the sooner."

"Did he bring any news from the Aigues?" asked the curé.

"Yes, my dear abbé," said Mme. Soudry. "Those people are the scourge of the countryside. How Madame de Montcornet, who is at any rate a lady by birth, should not understand her interests better, I cannot conceive."

"And yet they have a model before their eyes," said the curé.

"Who can you mean?" simpered Mme. Soudry.

"The Soulanges——"

"Oh! Yes," added the queen, after a pause.

"Here am I, worse luck!" cried Mme. Vermut, as she came into the room, "and without my neutralizing agent; though Vermut is too neutral where I am concerned to be called an 'agent' of any kind——"

Soudry, standing beside Guerbet, saw the basket-chaise stop before the Tivoli. "What the devil is that blessed Rigou after?" he exclaimed. "The old tiger-cat never takes a step in vain."

"Blessed is just the word for a Benedictine," said the stout receiver of taxes.

"He is going into the Café of Peace," cried Dr. Gourdon.

"Keep cool," said his brother, "he is distributing benedictions with closed fists, for you can hear them yelping inside at this distance."

"That café," began the curé, "is like the temple of Janus. It used to be called the Café of the War in the time of the Emperor, and the place was as peaceful as could be; the most respectable people used to go there for a friendly chat——"

"He calls that chatting!" broke in Sarcus. "Ye gods! what conversation was it that produced a little Bournier!"

"But since the house was called the Café of Peace, in honor of the Bourbons, there is a brawl there every day," pursued the abbé, finishing the sentence which the justice took the liberty of interrupting. The curé's joke, like quotations from the *Bilboquéide*, came up very frequently.

"Which is as much as to say that Burgundy will always be the land of fisticuffs," said Guerbet.

"That remark of yours is not so far wrong," said the curé, "it is pretty much the history of our country."

"I do not know the history of France," cried Soudry; "but before I begin upon it, I should dearly like to know why Rigou went into the café just now with Socquard."

"Oh," said the curé, "it was on no charitable errand, you may rest assured of that."

"It makes my flesh creep to look at that man," said Mme. Vermut.

"He is so much to be feared," the doctor said, "that I should not feel safe even after he were dead if he had a grudge against me; he is just the man to get up out of his coffin to play you some ugly trick."

"If there is any one on earth who can send the Upholsterer over here on the 15th, and take him in some trap, Rigou is the man to do it," said the mayor in his wife's ear.

"Especially if Gaubertin and you, dearie, have a hand in it, too——" she began aloud.

"There! what was I saying just now," exclaimed Guerbet, nudging M. Sarcus' elbow; "he has picked up some pretty girl at Socquard's, and is putting her into his chaise——"

"Until——" put in the poet.

"There is one for you, whose speech is without ill-intent," cried Guerbet, interrupting him.

"You are wrong, gentlemen," said Mme. Soudry. "Monsieur Rigou is thinking only of our interests; for, if I am not mistaken, that girl is one of Tonsard's daughters."

"Laying in a stock of vipers, like an apothecary," cried Guerbet.

"Any one would think, to hear you talk, that you had seen our apothecary, Monsieur Vermut," said Dr. Gourdon, indicating the little man as he crossed the market-place.

"Poor old boy!" said the doctor's brother (suspected of distilling the volatile elixir of wit in the company of the apothecary's wife). "Just see how he waddles along! And he is supposed to be a scientific man!"

"But for him," said the justice, "it would be a puzzle to know what to do about post-mortems. He discovered the traces of poison in poor Pigeron's body so cleverly that the chemists from Paris said in the Court at Auxerre that they could not have done it better——"

"He found nothing at all," said Soudry; "but, as Presi-

dent Gendrin says, it is just as well that people should believe that poison is always found out."

"Madame Pigeron did wisely to leave Auxerre," said Mme. Vermut. "She is a weak-minded thing, and a wicked woman," she added. "As if there were not sure and harmless methods of keeping a husband in order without having recourse to drugs to get rid of the genus. I should very much like any man to say anything against my conduct. Monsieur Vermut, worthy man, is scarcely ever in my way, and he has never been ill; and look at Madame de Montcornet, how she goes on, in her chalets and hermitages and what not, with that journalist whom she brought from Paris at her own charges; she fondles him under the general's nose."

"At her own charges?" cried Mme. Soudry. "Is that a fact? If we could have proof of that, what a pretty subject for an anonymous letter to the general——"

"The general——" said Mme. Vermut, "why, you would put a stop to nothing, the Upholsterer follows his calling."

"What is that, dear?" inquired Mme. Soudry.

"Why—he furnishes the bedroom."

"If Pigeron, poor fellow, instead of worrying his wife, had had the sense to do the same, he would be living yet," said the registrar.

Mme. Soudry leaned toward her neighbor, M. Guerbet of Conches, and administered to him one of the monkey's grimaces, inherited (as she imagined) from her late mistress; as if that mistress' smiles, like her old plate, were hers now by right of conquest. She redoubled her dose as she indicated Mme. Vermut, who was flirting with the poet of the *Bilboquéide*.

"How vulgar that woman is! What things she says, and what a way to behave! I do not know whether I can allow her to frequent our society any longer—especially when Monsieur Gourdon the poet is here."

"There is social morality summed up for you!" said the

curé, who hitherto had not spoken. He had watched the whole scene, and none of it was lost upon him.

After this epigram, or rather this social satire, so pithy and so true that it went home to every one present, a game of boston was proposed.

Is not this a true picture of life in every latitude of the "world," as we agree to call it? The language is different, it is true, but are not the very same things, nor more nor less, said in the most richly gilded salons in Paris?

III.

THE CAFÉ DE LA PAIX.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Rigou passed by the Café de la Paix. The slanting rays of the sunset steeped the whole picturesque village in glorious red, and raised a riot of flaming color in its window-panes, calling up the strangest and most improbable hues to contrast with the clear mirror-surface of the lake.

The deep schemer, brooding over the plots that he was weaving, allowed his horse to go at a foot-pace; so that, as he went slowly past the café, he heard his own name hurled at somebody in the course of one of the brawls which had, according to the Curé Taupin, produced a violent contrast between the name of the house and the chronic condition of strife within it.

It is necessary, for the sake of clearness, to enter into detail concerning the topography of this land of Cocaigne. It lay in the angle formed by the road with the market-place; on this latter side it was bounded by the café itself, and along the side of the road by the famous Tivoli, which was intended to be the scene of one of the episodes in the conspiracy against Montcornet.

The house was built after the fashion of Rigou's parsonage.

Three first-floor windows looked upon the road, and in the front, a glass entrance-door, with a window on either side of it, gave upon the market-place. There was another door at the side which gave admittance to the backyard, by way of a narrow passage which separated the café from the next house, where Vallet, the Soulanges haberdasher, lived. The whole building, the green shutters only excepted, was painted a bright yellow. It was one of the few houses in the little town which could boast of three stories and an attic floor, and had been so built for the following reasons:

In days before Ville-aux-Fayes attained its present amazing prosperity, and Soulanges was the principal place in the bailiwick, people who came on judicial business, or visitors for whom there was no room at the castle, used to occupy the second-floor rooms, four apartments provided with a bed apiece, and just sufficient necessaries to justify the appellation of "furnished lodgings;" but for the past twenty-five years their only occupants had been acrobats, itinerant quacks, hawkers, and commercial travelers. At fair time the rooms let for four francs a day, and Socquard's four apartments brought him some three hundred francs, to say nothing of the increase of custom to his café.

The front of the house in the market-place was adorned with paintings specially designed for it. In the wall-space on either side of the door you beheld billiard cues intertwined with love-knots, and, above the loops of ribbon, steaming punch-bowls shaped like Greek drinking cups. The words CAFÉ DE LA PAIX blazed in yellow on a green background, with a pyramid of billiard-balls—red, white, and blue—at either end. The window-sashes, painted green, contained small squares of cheap glass.

Half a score of arbor vitæ shrubs in boxes (some one ought to rename the plants the "café tree") stood on either side the entrance-door, a row of pretentious failures in vegetable life. The awnings, such as storekeepers use in Paris and other

great cities to screen their wares from the sun, were luxuries unknown in Soulanges; so each bottle in the window fulfilled the functions of a chemist's flask, for its contents were periodically recooked inside it. The lens-shaped bosses on the window-panes caught the rays of the sun like burning glasses, set the wines, liqueurs, and syrups boiling, and stewed the plums and cherries in the brandy. So great was the heat that Aglaé, her father, and the waiter were driven of an afternoon to take refuge on the benches outside, under the feeble shadow of the luckless shrubs which Mlle. Socquard sprinkled with tepid water. There were days when all three—father, daughter, and waiter—lay stretched out like domestic animals, fast asleep.

The interior of the café had been papered in 1804 with scenes from the romance of "Paul et Virginie," then in vogue. You beheld negroes cultivating coffee, which thus, at any rate, could be found on the wall-paper, if nowhere else, in an establishment where scarce a score of cups were called for in a month. Colonial products entered so little into ordinary life at Soulanges, that Socquard would have been at his wits' end if a stranger had asked for chocolate. The beverage would, however, have been forthcoming, and the customer would have been supplied with a nauseous brown broth produced by boiling one of the tablets sold for two sous by country grocers, an adulterated compound containing more starch, raw sugar, and pounded almonds than either genuine cocoa or sugar, and fabricated to ruin the trade in Spanish chocolate.

As to the coffee, Father Socquard simply boiled it in a large pipkin known in most households as "the big brown pot." He dropped in the mixture of powder and chicory, and, with intrepidity which a Parisian waiter might have envied, served up the decoction forthwith in an earthenware cup which had nothing to dread from a fall on the floor.

Sugar was still regarded in Soulanges with a reverence

which dated from the days of the Empire; Aglaé Socquard courageously brought out four whole lumps of sugar as large as hazelnuts, with a cup of coffee, for an itinerant hawker who had taken it into his head to call for that beverage of the man of letters.

There had been no change in the café since the day when all Soulanges flocked to admire the new bewitching wall decoration of gilt-framed mirrors alternating with brass hat-pegs, the counter painted to resemble mahogany, the reddish marble slab, with its gleaming plated vessels, and argand lamps, stated by rumor to be Gaubertin's gift to that fine woman, Mme. Socquard. Everything was besmeared with a soft, sticky compound, which can only be compared to the surface of old pictures which have lain forgotten in a lumber-room.

Suspended by a chain from the ceiling hung an argand lamp adorned with cut-glass drops, and provided with a globe-shaped oil reservoir which fed two separate wicks; the tables were painted to resemble marble, the seats upholstered with crimson Utrecht velvet—all these things had contributed to make the reputation of the Café of the War.

Thither, from 1802 till 1804, the townspeople of Soulanges repaired to play at dominoes or *brelan* (a game of cards), and to partake of glasses of liqueur or spiced wine, with brandied fruits and biscuits; for colonial produce was so dear that coffee, chocolate, and sugar were out of the question. Punch, like *bavaroise*,* was a great delicacy, and compounded with some strange, ropy, sweetening substance not unlike molasses. The name has been lost, but the substance made the inventor's fortune.

This concise account will suffice to conjure up similar pictures in the memories of those who have traveled in the provinces; and others who have never left Paris can form some dim idea of the smoke-begrimed ceiling of the Café de la

* Tea sweetened with syrup of capillaire.

Paix, and its mirrors dimmed with myriads of dark specks to bear witness to the independence of the dipterous tribes of Burgundy.

Socquard's wife, a beauty, who in the matter of gallant adventures surpassed La Tonsard of the Grand-I-Vert, had once queened it there, dressed in the latest fashion. She affected the sultana's turban, for in the days of the Empire the "sultana" enjoyed the vogue of the "angel" of the present day.

The whole feminine world of the valley repaired to Soulanges to copy the beauty's turbans, poke-bonnets, furred caps, and *coiffures chinoises* (Chinese headdresses). All the bigwigs of Soulanges were laid under contribution for these splendors. During the period of the short-waisted gowns which our mothers wore in the pride of their Imperial graces, Junie (for her name was Junie!) founded the house of Socquard; her husband owed to her a vineyard, the house in which they lived, and the Tivoli. It was said that M. Lupin's father did reckless things for handsome Junie Socquard; it was certain that she presented Gaubertin (his successor) with little Bournier.

These little matters, and the mysterious skill with which Socquard compounded his spiced wine, would be sufficient in themselves to account for the popularity of the café; but there were, beside, plenty of contributory causes. Wine, and wine only, could be obtained at the Grand-I-Vert or at any of the little taverns in the valley, but at Socquard's café there were liqueurs and foreign wines and fruits in brandy. It was the only place between Conches and Ville-aux-Fayes, and for six leagues round, where you could play a game of billiards, and nowhere else would you find such admirable punch. So the valley rang almost daily with the fame of a café associated with every idea of the utmost refinement of luxury for these people whose sensibility resided in their stomachs rather than in their hearts. Add to these reasons yet another. All who

frequented the place felt that it was a privilege to form an integral part of the Soulanges festival.

The Café de la Paix fulfilled the same end as the Grand-I-Vert, but in a town and in a sphere immediately above that of the tavern. It was a storehouse of poison, a half-way house for gossip between Ville-aux-Fayes and the valley. The Grand-I-Vert supplied the café with milk and cream, and Tonsard's daughters were in constant communication with the latter establishment.

For Socquard the market square of Soulanges was an appurtenance of his café. Hercules Socquard went from door to door, chatting with one and another, wearing for all costume a pair of trousers and an imperfectly buttoned waistcoat, after the manner of country bar-keepers. The folk with whom he chatted gave him warning if any one happened to enter his establishment, and he returned thither laggingly and, as it were, reluctant.

These details should suffice to convince the Parisian who has never stirred from Paris that it would be difficult—let us go further, and say that it would be impossible—to conceal the most trifling matter in the whole valley of the Avonne from Conches to Ville-aux-Fayes. There is no breach of continuity in country districts. There are taverns like the Grand-I-Vert and Café de la Paix dotted about from place to place to catch and echo every sound. Matters which possess absolutely no interest for anybody, accomplished, to boot, in the strictest privacy, are bruited abroad by a sort of witchcraft. Gossip fulfills the functions of the electric telegraph, and by such apparatus evil-tidings are borne prodigious distances in the twinkling of an eye.

Rigou checked his horse, alighted, and made the bridle fast to one of the door-posts at the Tivoli. Next he discovered a plausible pretext for listening to the dispute by seating himself between two of the windows, in such a position that, if he stretched his neck a little, he could see the persons within

and watch their movements, while at the same time he could hear the coarse words which shook the windows, and remain outside in perfect quiet.

"And if I were to tell old Rigou that your brother Nicholas has a grudge against La Péchina, and is always on the watch for her," shouted a shrill voice, "and that she will slip away under your seigneur's hands, he would soon tear the tripes out of the lot of you such as you are; a pack of scoundrels at the Grand-I-Vert!"

"And if you play us such a trick, Aglaé," yelled Marie Tonsard, "I'll do that to you which you will never tell to any but the worms in your coffin. Don't you meddle in Nicolas' affairs, nor yet in mine with Bonnébault!"

Marie, urged by her grandmother, had followed Bonnébault on a spy's errand. Through the window at which Rigou had stationed himself, she had seen Bonnébault displaying his airs and graces for Mlle. Socquard, who felt bound to smile on a customer in return for his sufficiently agreeable compliments. That smile had brought on the tempestuous scene and a lightning flash of a revelation of no small value to Rigou.

"Well, Father Rigou, are *you* helping to wear out my premises?" It was Socquard's voice, and he clapped the money-lender on the shoulder.

The saloon-keeper had just returned from an outhouse at the end of the garden, whence such machinery as whirligigs, see-saws, and weighing machines were being brought out to be put in their places in the Tivoli for the delectation of the public. Socquard had come up noiselessly, for he was shod with the cheap yellow-leather slippers which are sold in such quantities in the provinces.

"If you had fresh lemons, I would take a glass of lemonade," said Rigou in answer; "it is hot this evening."

"But who is there squalling inside in such a way?" asked Socquard, and, looking through the window, he beheld his daughter and Marie at close quarters.

"They are fighting for Bonnébault," said Rigou, with a sardonic glance.

Socquard choked down a father's annoyance in the interests of the saloon-keeper. The saloon-keeper thought it the more prudent course to follow Rigou's example and listen to the sounds from without; while the father in him yearned to enter and declare that Bonnébault, though full of estimable qualities as a customer, was absolutely worthless considered as the son-in-law of a Soulanges notable. Yet, Father Socquard had received but few offers of marriage for his daughter. The girl was twenty-two years old, and in height, weight, and size she rivaled Mme. Vermichel, whose activity was a standing marvel. A life behind a counter appeared to have developed a tendency to corpulence, which Aglaé inherited from her father.

"What the devil has got the girls?" inquired Socquard of his neighbor.

"Oh," said the Benedictine, "'tis a devil which the church has caught more often than any other."

For all answer Socquard fell to examining the painted billiard cues on the wall between the windows. Patches of plaster had dropped away, till the beholder was puzzled to understand how they had once been bound together.

At that very moment Bonnébault issued from the billiard-room, cue in hand, and struck Marie smartly on the shoulder.

"You have made me miss my stroke," he cried, "but I shall not miss you, and I shall keep on until you clap a stopper on your gab."

Socquard and Rigou thought it time to interfere. Both of them went inside, and immediately, with a sound as of the distant practice of a drum corps, there arose such a swarm of flies that the room was darkened. After the first alarm, however, the cloud of huge bluebottles and bloodthirsty smaller brethren, with a gadfly or two among them, settled down again among a regiment of sticky-looking bottles on a

triple row of shelves so black with specks that the paint beneath was quite invisible.

Marie was crying. To be beaten by the man she loves beneath the eyes of a rival is a humiliation which no woman will endure, no matter what her position in the social scale. Indeed, the lower her rank, the more violent the expression of her hatred. Marie Tonsard saw neither Socquard nor Rigou. She sank upon a seat in gloomy and ferocious silence. The old Benedictine eyed her curiously.

"Aglaé," said Socquard, "go and find a fresh lemon, and rinse a wineglass yourself."

"You did wisely to send your daughter away," said Rigou in a low voice; "she might perhaps have been killed in another moment," and he glanced significantly at Marie Tonsard's hand. She had caught up a stool, and was about to hurl it at Aglaé's head.

"Come, come! Marie," said old Socquard, stepping in front of her, "people do not come here to fling stools about, and if you were to break my glasses there would be a bill which you would not pay me in cow's milk——"

"Father Socquard, your daughter is a reptile. I am every bit as good as she is, do you hear? If you do not want Bonnébault for a son-in-law, it is time that you told him to go and play billiards somewhere else; he is losing five francs every minute——"

At the first outburst of a flood of words, which were shrieked aloud rather than spoken, Socquard took Marie by the waist and flung her out at the door in spite of her cries and struggles. He was not a moment too soon; Bonnébault came out of the billiard-room for the second time, his eyes ablaze.

"It shall not end like this!" screamed Marie Tonsard.

"You! bow yourself out!" yelled Bonnébault (Socquard had thrown his arms about him to prevent violence). "Be off! or I will never speak to you nor look at you again."

"*You!*" cried Marie, glancing at Bonnébault with fury in her eyes. "Give me back my money first, and I will leave you to Mademoiselle Socquard, if she is rich enough to keep you——"

At this point Marie was frightened, for she saw that Hercules Socquard could scarcely master Bonnébault, and with a tigress' spring she fled out into the road.

Rigou put Marie into his chaise to hide her from the furious Bonnébault, whose voice reached the Soudrys' house across the square; then, when Marie was hidden away, he returned for his glass of lemonade, examining meanwhile the group formed by Plissoud, Amaury, Viollet, and the waiter, who were all endeavoring to calm Bonnébault.

"Come, hussar! it is your turn," said Amaury, a short, fair-haired, blear-eyed young man.

"And, beside, she has gone away," said Viollet.

If ever surprise was expressed on human countenance, it was visible in Plissoud's face when he discovered that the usurer of Blangy, sitting at one of the tables while the quarrel went on, was paying more attention to him (Plissoud) than to the two girls. The clerk of the court was thrown off his guard, his face wore the peculiar startled look that a man wears when he comes suddenly on another man against whom he is plotting. He went abruptly back to the billiard-room.

"Good-day, Father Socquard," said Rigou.

"I will bring your carriage round," said Socquard; "take your time."

"How could one get to know what they say over their billiards?" said Rigou to himself; and just then he saw the waiter's face in the looking-glass.

The waiter was a man-of-all-work. He pruned Socquard's vines, swept out the café and billiard saloon, kept the garden in order, and watered the floor of the Tivoli, and all for the sum of sixty francs per annum. He never wore a jacket save on great occasions; his costume consisted of a pair of blue

linen trousers, heavy shoes, and a striped velvet vest, with the addition of a coarse homespun apron when on duty in the café or billiard-room. Those apron strings were his insignia of office. Socquard hired the young fellow at the last fair; for in that valley, and all over Burgundy for that matter, servants are hired by the year, and come to the hiring fair exactly like horses.

"What is your name?" asked Rigou.

"Michel, at your service," the lad answered.

"Does Daddy Fourchon come here now and again?"

"Two or three times a week with Monsieur Vermichel. Monsieur Vermichel gives me a few sous for letting him know when his wife is going to pounce in upon him."

"He is a good man, is Daddy Fourchon; he has had some education and has plenty of commonsense," said Rigou, and he paid for his lemonade, and left the stale-smelling room as Socquard brought the chaise round to the door.

Rigou had just taken his seat when he saw the apothecary, and hailed him with, "Halloo! Monsieur Vermut!" Vermut looked up, and, seeing Rigou, hastened toward him. Rigou stepped down again, and said in Vermut's ear, "Do you know whether there is any irritant which can destroy the skin and induce disease—say a whitlow on the finger, for instance?"

"If Monsier Gourdon undertakes it, yes," said the man of drugs.

"Vermut, not a word of this to any one, if you do not want us to fall out. But tell Monsieur Gourdon about it, and tell him to come to see me, the day after to-morrow, and I will give him a forefinger to amputate—it will be rather a delicate job."

And with that the ex-mayor stepped into his chaise beside Marie Tonsard, leaving the little apothecary dumfounded.

"Well, little viper," said Rigou, laying a hand on the girl's arm, after fastening the reins to a ring on the leather

apron which covered them in. "So you think you will keep Bonnébault by giving way to temper like this, do you? If you were wise, you would help on his marriage with that big lump of stupidity, and then you could take your revenge."

Marie could not help smiling as she answered, "Oh! what a bad man you are! You are our master, and that is the truth."

"Listen, Marie; I am a friend to the peasants, but I cannot have one of you come and put himself between my teeth and a mouthful of game. Your brother Nicolas, as Aglaé said, is waylaying La Péchina. It is not right, for the child is under my protection; she is down in my will for thirty thousand francs, and I mean her to make a good match. I know that Nicolas, with your sister Catherine to help him, all but killed the poor child this morning; you will see your brother and sister, tell them this—'If you let La Péchina alone, Father Rigou will save Nicolas from the conscription——'"

"You are the devil himself," cried Marie. "People say that you have signed a compact with him. Is it possible?"

"Yes," said Rigou, with gravity.

"They used to say so at 'upsittings,' but I did not believe them."

"The devil promised that no attempts upon my life should succeed; that I should never be robbed; that I should live for a hundred years without an illness; that I should succeed in everything that I undertook, and until the hour of my death I should be as young as a two-year cockerel——"

"As you certainly are," said Marie. "Well, then, it is *devilish* easy for you to save my brother from the army——"

"If he has a mind; for he will have to lose a finger, that is all," said Rigou. "I will tell him how."

"Why, you are taking the upper road!" said Marie.

"I never go the other way of a night," said the unfrocked monk.

"Because of the crucifix?" queried Marie artlessly.

"That is just it, cunning girl!" returned the diabolical personage.

They were reaching a spot where the road lay in a hollow, a cutting through a furrow in the land, with a tolerably steep bank rising on either side such as you often see on French cross-country roads. On the hither side of this hollow the road forked to Cerneux and Ronquerolles, and in the angle of the fork a crucifix stood. Any one standing on either bank might fire on his man to a certainty, for he could almost clap the muzzle in the passenger's face; and this was the more easy, since that the slopes behind were covered with vines, and there were chance-sown brambles and bushes on the bank which afforded cover. It may be guessed, therefore, why the usurer, with unfailing prudence, never went that way at night. The Thune flows round the base of the little hill which they call the Cross Green. Never was there a spot better adapted for murder and vengeance, for the Ronquerolles road runs down to the bridge over the Avonne by the hunting-lodge, and the road to Cerneux crosses the high road in such a sort that the murderer would practically have a choice of four roads, and might fly in the direction of the Aigues, or Ville-aux-Fayes, or Ronquerolles, or Cerneux, and leave his pursuers in perplexity as to the way he had taken.

"I will set you down just outside the village," said Rigou, when they came in sight of the first houses of Blangy.

"Because of Annette, you old coward!" cried Marie. "Are you going to send that girl away soon? You have had her for three years. What amuses me is that your old woman is so well. God avenges Himself."

IV.

THE TRIUMVIRATE OF VILLE-AUX-FAYES.

The prudent money-lender had made a law that his wife and Jean should sleep between sunset and sunrise, proving to them that the house would never be robbed while he himself sat up till midnight and lay late. Not only had he secured the house to himself between the hours of seven in the evening and five in the morning, but he accustomed both wife and man to respect his slumbers and those of the Hagar whose room lay beyond his own.

So the next morning about half-past six, Mme. Rigou came and knocked timidly at her husband's door. (With Jean's aid she had already looked after the poultry.) "Monsieur Rigou," she said, "you asked me to call you."

The sound of the woman's voice, her bearing, and the way in which she obeyed an order, quaking all the while lest her very obedience should be taken amiss, showed the utter immolation of the poor creature to her ingenious petty tyrant and her affection for him.

"All right!" cried Rigou.

"Is Annette to be wakened too?"

"No. Let her sleep on. She has been up all night," he answered gravely. The man was always serious even when he indulged in a joke. As a matter of fact, Annette had secretly opened the door to Sibilet, Fourchon, and Catherine Tonsard, all of whom came at different times between eleven and one o'clock that morning.

Ten minutes later Rigou came downstairs. He was dressed more carefully than usual, and greeted his wife with a "Good-morning, old woman," which made her prouder than she would have been to see a Montcornet at her feet.

"Jean," said Rigou, addressing the lay-brother, "don't leave the house. Don't let them rob me; you would lose more by it than I."

It was by mingling kindness, and rebuffs, and hope, and hard words, in this way, that the learned egoist had broken in his three slaves to a dog-like fidelity and attachment.

Again Rigou took the upper road to avoid the Cross Green, and reached the market-place of Soulanges about eight o'clock. He had just made the reins fast to the nearest post by the flight of steps, when a shutter was put back, and Soudry exhibited his countenance. Two small black eyes gave a cunning expression to a face seamed by the smallpox.

"Let us begin by breaking a crust together," he said, "for we shall not get any breakfast at Ville-aux-Fayes before one o'clock."

He called under his breath to a damsel as young and pretty as Rigou's servant. The girl came noiselessly down the stairs; he bade her bring a piece of ham and some bread, and went himself to the cellar for wine.

For the thousandth time Rigou contemplated the parlor; the oak wainscot that rose to elbow height, the mouldings on the ceiling, the spacious, handsomely painted cupboards, the neat stove, and the magnificent timepiece which once belonged to Mlle. Laguerre. The backs of the chairs were lyre-shaped; the woodwork painted white and varnished; the seats were of green morocco with gilded nail-heads. The massive mahogany table was covered with green oilcloth, scored with dark lines, and bound with green binding. The pains which Urbain bestowed on the polishing of the parquetry floor attested the fact that his mistress had herself been a domestic servant.

"Pshaw!" said Rigou to himself. "This kind of thing costs too much. One can eat just as comfortably in my room at home, and I save the interest on the money laid out in this useless show. Why, where is Madame Soudry?" he inquired,

as the mayor of Soulanges came in with a venerable bottle in his hand.

"She is asleep."

"And you do not disturb her slumbers much," said Rigou.

The old gendarme winked facetiously, and indicated the ham which the pretty Jeannette was bringing in.

"A nice morsel like that wakes you up," he said, "home-cured! We only cut into it yesterday."

"I would not have thought it of you, old chum; where did you pick her up?" asked the old monk, lowering his voice for Soudry's ear.

"Like the ham," said the gendarme, with another wink, "she has been in the house for a week."

Jeannette still wore her night-cap, and had thrust her bare feet into her slippers. She wore a short petticoat, and the straps of her bodice were passed over her shoulders in peasant fashion; the crossed folds of a bandana handkerchief could not altogether hide her fresh and youthful charms; altogether she looked no less appetizing than the ham vaunted by Soudry. She was plump and short. The mottled red of the bare arms that hung by her side, the large dimpled hands and short fingers shapely fashioned at the tips, all spoke of high health. Add to this a face of a thoroughly Burgundian type, ruddy, but white at the temples, ears, and throat; chestnut hair, eyes which turned slightly upward at the outer corners, wide nostrils, a sensual mouth, and a trace of down upon the cheeks. With a lively expression tempered by a deceptive demureness, she was the very model of a roguish servant-girl.

"Upon my word, Jeannette *is* like the ham," declared Rigou. "If I had not an Annette, I should like a Jeannette."

"One is as good as the other," said Soudry, "for your Annette is fair, and soft, and delicate. How is Madame Rigou? Is she asleep?" Soudry resumed abruptly, to show Rigou that he understood the jest.

"She wakes at cock-crow," said Rigou, "but she goes to

roost with the hens. I stay up myself and read the 'Constitutionnel.' Evening and morning my wife lets me doze; she would not come into the room for the world——"

"Here it is just the other way," put in Jeannette. "The mistress sits up with company and plays at cards; there are sometimes fifteen of them in the drawing-room. The master goes off to bed at eight, and we get up at daybreak——"

"It looks different to you," said Rigou, "but it comes to the same thing in the end. Well, my dear, you come to me, and I will send Annette here. It will be the same thing, with a difference."

"Old scoundrel," said Soudry, "you will make her blush!"

"Eh, gendarme! so you only want one horse in your stable? After all, every one takes his luck where he finds it."

Jeannette, in obedience to her master's order, went to put out his clothes.

"You promised to marry her when your wife dies, I suppose?" asked Rigou.

"It is the only way at our age," said Soudry.

"If the girls had ambition, it would be a short cut to widower's estate," returned Rigou; "more particularly, if Jeannette heard Mme. Soudry mention her way of soaping the stairs."

Both husbands grew thoughtful at this. When Jeannette came to announce that all was in readiness, Soudry took her away with him, with a "Come and help me," which drew a smile from the unfrocked monk.

"There is a difference after all," said he; "I should not be afraid to leave him with Annette."

Fifteen minutes after, Soudry, dressed in his best, stepped into the basket-chaise, and the pair went round by the lake on the way to Ville-aux-Fayes.

"And how about yonder castle?" asked Rigou, as they caught a glimpse of the end of the manor-house. The stress which the old Jacobin gave to the word "castle" revealed

the hatred of the fine halls and great estates which small proprietors cherish in their souls.

"Why, I am sure, I hope it will stand for my lifetime," said Soudry. "The Comte de Soulanges was my general; he has done me a good turn; he managed my pension nicely, and then he allows Lupin to manage his estate, and Lupin's father made a fortune by managing it. There will be another to come after Lupin, and so long as there are Counts of Soulanges the place will be respected. They are a good sort, they live and let live——"

"Ah! but the general has three children, and perhaps after his death they will not agree. Some day or other the sons and the son-in-law will sell the place, and that mine of lead and old iron will be sold to the storekeepers, whom we will contrive to squeeze."

The castle of Soulanges seemed to defy the unfrocked monk.

"Ah! yes, they used to build solidly in those times!" exclaimed Soudry. "But Monsieur de Soulanges is economizing at this moment so as to entail the Soulanges estate; it is to go with the title——"

"Entails fall through," said Rigou.

When the theme was exhausted, the pair fell to discussing the merits of their respective domestics in a Burgundian dialect, a trifle too broad to print. This never-failing topic lasted them till they reached Gaubertin's headquarters. Even the most impatient reader may perhaps feel sufficient curiosity on the subject of Ville-aux-Fayes to excuse a brief digression.

It is an odd-sounding word, but it is easily explained. It is a corruption of the Low Latin *villa-in-fago*, the manor in the woods. The name is sufficient to tell us that a forest formerly covered the delta of the Avonne which flows five leagues away into the Yonne. Doubtless, it was a Frank who built a stronghold on the ridge which thereabout makes a detour, and slopes gradually down into the strip of plain

where Leclercq the deputy had bought an estate. The conqueror made a broad and long moat, and so intrenched himself in the delta. His was a strong position, and, for a feudal lord, an extremely convenient one for the collection of tolls and pontage on the bridges by which all wayfarers must pass, and grinding dues at the water-mills.

Such is the history of the first beginnings of Ville-aux-Fayes. Every feudal stronghold or religious settlement attracted residents about it, to form the nucleus of a town at a later day when the place was in a position to create or develop an industry, or to attract business. Jean Rouvet's invention of water-carriage for timber, requiring wharves in places suitable for intercepting the floating piles, was the making of Ville-aux-Fayes, then a mere village in comparison with Soulanges. Ville-aux-Fayes became the headquarters of the trade in the timber which was grown along both streams for a distance of twelve miles. Workmen flocked to Ville-aux-Fayes, for many hands were needed to build up the piles which the Yonne carries into the Seine, beside the salvage and recovery of "stray" rafts. This working population supplied consumers of produce and stimulated trade. So it came to pass that Ville-aux-Fayes, which numbered scarce six hundred inhabitants at the end of the sixteenth century, in 1790 had a population of two thousand, which had doubled since Gaubertin came to the place. This is how it was brought about:

When the Legislative Assembly reconstituted the electoral divisions, Ville-aux-Fayes, on account of its geographical position, was selected as the seat of local government, to the exclusion of Soulanges. The position of Ville-aux-Fayes marked it out for a sub-prefecture, and a sub-prefecture entailed a court of first instance, and the hierarchy of officials required by both institutions. With the increase of population in Paris there began to be an increase in the demand for fuel, prices rose, and Ville-aux-Fayes grew more important

with the development of its trade. Gaubertin's second start in life had been determined by foresight; he felt sure that Paris would grow with the peace; and, in fact, the population increased by one-third between 1815 and 1825.

The configuration of Ville-aux-Fayes is determined by the lay of the land. Wharves line either side of the promontory. Above the town and below the hillside covered with the forest of Soulanges a bar has been made across the river to stop the floating timber; and here the outskirts of Ville-aux-Fayes begin. The lower town lies in the broadest part of the delta, along the brink of a sheet of water—a lake formed by the Avonne; but the upper town, consisting of some five hundred houses and gardens, is built on the higher ground which surrounds the promontory on three sides. This elevation, which was cleared of forest three centuries ago, looks down on the ever-changing picture of the Avonne lake, a sparkling surface covered with rafts built of timber taken from the great piles on the wharves at the water's edge. The streams loaded with floating wood, the picturesque waterfalls on the Avonne, which flow down from a higher level into the river, turning mill-wheels, and furnishing water-power to several factories on its way, all combine to form a busy scene, which is the more unusual on account of its background of green masses of forest; while the distant view up the valley of the Aigues stands out in glorious contrast to the sombre setting of the forest-clad hillsides above the town of Ville-aux-Fayes.

On the side of the valley opposite this vast curtain of trees the king's highway crosses the river by a bridge, and pursues its course till it reaches a row of poplars within a quarter of a league of Ville-aux-Fayes, where a little hamlet lies about a post-station situated there on a large farm. The cross-road from Soulanges likewise curves away round to the bridge, where it joins the king's highway.

Gaubertin had built himself a house in the delta, with a view of making such a place that the lower town should be as

handsome as the upper. It was a modern stone-house, a single story high, with attics in the slate-covered roof, and the usual cast-iron balconies, Venetian blinds, much-painted window-sashes, and no ornament save a fretwork under the cornice. There was a spacious courtyard attached to the house, and an "English garden" at the back, on the brink of the Avonne. The sub-prefecture could not be allowed to fall short of such elegance; and, at the instance of the deputies, Messieurs Leclercq and Ronquerolles, it was transferred from its wretched temporary quarters to a brand-new mansion built opposite Gaubertin's house. There also the town hall was built, and quite recently a Palais de Justice had been erected for the houseless court of first instance; in fact, Ville-aux-Fayes owed a whole series of imposing modern edifices to the spirited example set by its mayor. A police-station completed the outline of the market square.

These changes, of which the inhabitants were not a little proud, were due to Gaubertin's influence. And he, but a few days before, had received the cross of the Legion of Honor on the occasion of the approaching Birthday. In a mushroom town thus constituted there is no aristocracy and no old *noblesse;* and the citizens, proud of their independence, took up the quarrel of the peasants against a count of the Empire who had gone over to the Bourbons. To their thinking, the real oppressors were the oppressed. The attitude of the trading town was so well known at the Home Office that the sub-prefect had been specially chosen; he was a conciliatory spirit, educated by his uncle, the famous des Lupeaulx; a man of compromises, familiar with the expedients by which men are governed, the sort of man who is dubbed a time-server by puritanical politicians capable themselves of doing a great deal worse.

Gaubertin's house was adorned within with all the tasteless inventions of modern luxury. In the dining-room you beheld expensive paper-hangings with gilt borders, bronze chande-

liers, mahogany furniture, chairs covered with crimson leather, astral lamps, round-tables with marble tops, a white gilt-edged porcelain dessert-service, and colored lithographs; the drawing-room was upholstered in blue cashmere; the whole house looked dreary and commonplace to the last degree; but at Ville-aux-Fayes it was looked upon as the last extreme of the luxury of a Sardanapalus. Mme. Gaubertin played the part of a lady of fashion with great effect; she adopted sundry small affectations, and minced and simpered at forty-five in her quality of mayoress who has an established position and a little court of her own.

Do not the three houses belonging respectively to Rigou, Soudry, and Gaubertin reflect the country village, the little town, and the sub-prefecture to perfection for those who know France?

Gaubertin was neither a clever man nor a man of talent, but to all appearance he possessed both talent and cleverness. He owed the unfailing justice of his forecasts, like his cunning, to an excessive greed of gain. He coveted fortune, not for his wife's sake, nor for his two daughters, nor for his son, nor for himself, nor yet for family considerations and the consequence which money brings; even when the quickening impulse of vengeance was set aside, he loved money-getting; he loved the game for its own sake, like Nucingen the banker, of whom it was said that he was always fingering the gold in both pockets at once.

The round of business was this man's whole life; and now that he was full to repletion, he worked as hard as though he wanted daily bread. All the schemes, and trickery, and craft of business as a fine art, all the clever strokes to be made, statements of accounts and receipts, all the clash of conflicting interests put Gaubertin in spirits; they set the blood in circulation and distributed the bile equally over his system. He came and went, rode and drove, and went by boat, and attended sales and auctions in Paris; nothing escaped his at-

tention, and he held countless threads in his hands without confusion.

Gaubertin was quick and decided in his movements and ideas; short, small, and compact, with his sharply cut nose, bright eyes, and erect ears; there was a suggestion of the hunting-dog about him. The perfectly round and sunburned face, from which the brown ears stood out (for he habitually wore a cap), was in perfect agreement with his character. His nose turned up at the end; the hard lips looked as though they could never unclose to speak a kindly word. A pair of sleek, bushy, black whiskers under the high-colored cheek-bones disappeared in his stock. His frizzled iron-gray hair arranged itself naturally in a succession of rolls like an old-fashioned magistrate's wig; it looked as though it had been crimped by the scorching heat of the fire which burned within that dark head, and flashed in sparks from the little gray eyes. The wrinkles circling their rims were doubtless caused by screwing them up to gaze across country in full sunlight, a characteristic which completed his face. In person he was spare, muscular, and slight; he had the claw-like horny hands covered with hair peculiar to those who take a practical part in their work. His manner usually pleased those who dealt with him, for he could assume a deceptive gayety; he could talk a great deal without saying anything which he did not intend to say; and he wrote but little, so that he might deny anything not in his favor which might escape him at unawares. He had an honest cashier to keep his books; men of Gaubertin's stamp can always unearth an honest subordinate, and in their own interests they make of him their first dupe.

When Rigou's little basket-chaise appeared toward eight o'clock in the poplar avenue by the post-house near the bridge, Gaubertin in cap, jacket, and boots was already returning from his wharves. He quickened his pace at the sight of the chaise, for he rightly guessed that Rigou would only put himself out for "the big business."

"Good-day, Daddy Nab; good-day, stomach full of gall and wisdom," said he, tapping either visitor on the chest. "We are going to talk business, and we will talk glass in hand, by George, that is the way to do it."

"You ought to grow fat at that trade," said Rigou.

"I am working too hard; I do not keep indoors like the rest of you, who have the bad habit of staying at home like an old pensioner. Oh! you are well off, upon my word, you can do business in an easy-chair, sit at the table with your back to the fire—business comes to find you. Just come in, the house is yours, by George, so long as you stop in it."

A man in a blue livery, faced with red, came to take the horse away to the stables in the yard.

Gaubertin left his guests in the garden for a moment, while he gave orders concerning breakfast. Then he came out to them.

"Well, my little wolves," he said, rubbing his hands, "the gendarmerie of Soulanges were on their way to Conches at daybreak this morning; they are about to arrest the wood-stealers, no doubt. They are in a hurry, by George, they are!" (He looked at his watch.) "By this time those fellows ought to be formally and duly arrested."

"Probably they are," said Rigou.

"Well, what do people say in the village, have they made up their minds?"

"What should they make up their minds to do?" demanded Rigou. "This is no concern of ours," he added, giving Soudry a look.

"How is it no concern of yours? If our concerted measures force them to sell the Aigues, who will make five or six hundred thousand francs by it? Shall I, all by myself? I cannot fork out two millions, my purse is not long enough. I have three children to set up in life, and a wife who will not listen to reason on the score of expense. I want, and must have partners. Daddy Nab has the money ready, has he not?

He has not a single mortgage which will not have expired; he has bonds for which I am answerable now for his money. I put myself down for eight hundred thousand francs, and my son the judge for two hundred thousand; we are counting on Daddy Nab for another two hundred thousand. How much do you mean to put in, reverend father?"

"The rest," said Rigou coolly.

"The deuce! I should like to have my hand where you have your heart! And what are you going to do?"

"Why, I shall do as you do. Tell us your plan."

"My own plan," said Gaubertin, "is to take double quantity, so as to sell half to those in Conches, Cerneux, and Blangy who want land. Soudry will have customers at Soulanges, and you have yours here. That is not the difficulty. How shall we arrange among ourselves? How shall we divide the big lots?"

"Dear me," said Rigou, "nothing more simple. Each will take what suits him best. I, in the first place, shall give nobody any trouble. I will take the woods with my son-in-law and Soudry. There has been so much damage done in them that they will not tempt you. We will leave you the rest for your share, faith! you will have your money's worth."

"Will you sign an agreement to that effect?" asked Soudry.

"The agreement would be worth nothing," Gaubertin answered. "Beside, you see that I am acting on the square; I am trusting implicitly to Rigou, for the purchase will be made in his name."

"That is good enough for me," said Rigou.

"I make one stipulation; I am to have the hunting-lodge and the outbuildings and fifty acres round about it. I will pay you for the land. I shall make the lodge into a country-house; it will be near my woods. Madame Gaubertin—Madame Isaure, as she chooses to be called—will make her 'villa' of it, she says."

"I have no objection," said Rigou.

Gaubertin looked round on all sides; and having made quite certain that by no possibility could any one overhear them, he continued, "Eh! now, between ourselves, do you think they are likely to play us some scurvy trick?"

"For instance?" asked Rigou, who was determined not to understand till Gaubertin should speak out.

"Why, suppose that one of the wildest of the lot, and a handy man with a gun into the bargain, should send a bullet whistling about the count's ears—just by way of bluster?"

"The count is the man to run up and collar him."

"Michaud then?——"

"Michaud would keep it quiet; he would bide his time, and play the spy, and find out the man at last and those who had set him on."

"You are right," said Gaubertin. "Thirty of them ought to rise at once. Some of them would be sent to the hulks. After all, they would pick out the scamps, and we would rather be rid of them when they have served our turn. You have two or three good-for-nothings yonder—the Tonsards and Bonnébault, for instance——"

"Tonsard might do some queer stroke of work," said Soudry; "I know him. We will egg him on further through Vaudoyer and Courtecuisse."

"I have Courtecuisse," said Rigou.

"And I have Vaudoyer in the hollow of my hand."

"Let us be cautious!" said Rigou. "Caution, above all things!"

"Come, your reverence, can it be that you imagine that there is any harm in talking about things that are going on about us? Is it we who are taking out warrants, locking people up, stealing wood, and gleaning? If the count goes the right way to work, if he arranges with some farmer-general to exploit the Aigues, it will be good-by to the baskets, the vintage is over. And you will lose more by it than I. What

we say is said between ourselves, and for our own benefit, for I certainly shall not say a word to Vaudoyer which I could not repeat before God and men. But there is no harm in looking forward and profiting by events as they arise. The peasants hereabout are a hot-headed race; the general's regulations and Michaud's severity and persecutions have driven them to the end of their patience. To-day they have made a mess of the business, and I will wager that there has been a scuffle with the gendarmerie. Let us have breakfast."

Mme. Gaubertin came out into the garden to find her guests. She was a somewhat pale-faced woman, with long ringlets drooping on either side of her face. She played the passionate-virtuous rôle, the woman who has never known love. She cultivated platonic affection with the officials, and had for her gallant slave the public prosecutor, her *patito*, as she called him. Mme. Gaubertin was addicted to caps with top-knots (though preferably she wore nothing to hide her hair), and overdid blue and pale rose-color. She danced. At forty-five she had all the affectations of a young miss, in spite of large feet and alarming hands. She desired to be called Isaure, for amid her many oddities and absurdities she had the good taste to consider that the name of Gaubertin was unpresentable. Her eyes were pale, her hair of some undecided tint resembling dingy nankeen; and, let it be added, a goodly number of young ladies took her for their model, stabbed the sky with their eyes, and posed as angels.

"Well, gentlemen," she said, as she greeted them, "I have strange news for you. The gendarmes have come back——"

"Have they brought any prisoners?"

"None whatever! The general asked for their pardon in advance—and it was granted in honor of the happy anniversary of the accession of our King."

The three associates stared at each other.

"That big Cuirassier is cleverer than I thought him," said Gaubertin. "Let us sit down to table; we need consolation

after this. After all, the game is not lost, it is only drawn out. It lies with you now, Rigou."

Soudry and Rigou went home again out of spirits. None of them could think of any expedient for bringing about a catastrophe for their own advantage, so they trusted, as Gaubertin had suggested, that something might turn up.

There were certain Jacobins, in the early days of the Revolution, who were furious when the clemency of Louis XVI. defeated their purposes, and deliberately provoked the severity of the court that they might find an excuse for bringing about the anarchy which meant both power and fortune for them. In the same manner, the Comte de Montcornet's formidable enemies put their last hope in the future rigorous methods of Michaud and the keepers. Gaubertin promised his support in general terms; he had no wish that his understanding with Sibilet should be known. Nothing can equal the discretion of a man of Gaubertin's stamp, unless, indeed, it is the discretion of an ex-gendarme or an unfrocked monk. In the hands of three such men, each steeped to the lips in cupidity and hatred, the plot could only end well, or, more properly speaking, ill.

V.

HOW A VICTORY WAS WON WITHOUT A BLOW.

Mme. Michaud's fears had come of the second-sight of passionate love. When a soul finds its all-in-all in another soul, it comprehends in the end the whole world in which that other dwells, and sees clearly in that atmosphere. Love brings to a woman the presentiments which, at a later day, become the second-sight of motherhood. While the poor young wife fell into the habit of listening to the confused voices which reach us across the mysterious tracts of space, a scene in which her husband's life was actually threatened took place at the Grand-I-Vert.

Those who had been first astir that morning, before five o'clock, had seen the Soulanges gendarmerie go by on the way to Conches. The news spread quickly; and those interested were astonished to learn from the people who lived on the higher road that a detachment of gendarmerie, under the Lieutenant of Ville-aux-Fayes, had gone through the forest of the Aigues. It happened to be a Monday, which in itself was a sufficient reason why the laborers should go to the wine-shop, and it was likewise the eve of the anniversary of the return of the Bourbons; not that those who frequented that den of thieves, the Grand-I-Vert, required that "august cause" (as it used to be called) to justify their presence in the tavern, though they would have urged the plea loudly enough if they had seen the shadow of an official of any sort or description.

The Tonsards, with Godain, who was in a manner one of the family, and Vaudoyer, and an old vine-dresser named Laroche, were all assembled there. Laroche lived from hand to mouth; he was one of the Blangy delinquents who had been pressed into the service to cure the general of his taste for prosecutions. Blangy had likewise furnished three other men, twelve women, eight girls, and five boys; the women and children had husbands or parents to be responsible for them; but all of them were paupers; in fact, they composed the entire pauper population of Blangy. The vine-growers did well in 1823, and the large quantity of wine in 1826 was sure to mean another good year for them; the general had employed a good deal of labor, and had set money circulating in the neighboring communes, so that it had been no easy task to find a hundred and twenty proletarians in Blangy, Conches, and Cerneux. It had, however, been done. Mothers and grandmothers who had not a sou of their own, like Granny Tonsard, had been put forward. This Laroche, the old laborer, possessed absolutely nothing; he was unlike Tonsard, he had no hot and vicious blood in his veins; it was a dumb, cold hatred that sustained him; he worked in sullen

silence, detesting work, and unable to live without it. His features were hard, his expression repellent; his vigor had not failed him, despite his sixty years, but his back was weakened and bowed; he saw no future before him, he would have no bit of field to call his own, and he envied those who had land. So he ravaged the forest of the Aigues without mercy and delighted in doing wanton damage.

"Shall we let them take us away?" asked Laroche. "After Conches they will come to Blangy; this is my second offense, they will give me three months for it."

"And what can you do against the gendarmerie, you old sot?" retorted Vaudoyer.

"Do? Could we not slash their horses' legs with our scythes? They would soon come down, their guns are not loaded, and when they found themselves outmatched by ten to one, they would soon be obliged to take themselves off. Suppose that the three villages rose, and two or three gendarmes were killed, would they guillotine everybody? They would soon be obliged to give it up, as they did once before on the other side of Burgundy when they called the soldiers out for another affair like this. Bah! the soldiers went, and the peasants kept on cutting wood; they had done it for years and years, just as we have here."

"Life for life," said Vaudoyer; "it would be better to kill just one of them; and to do it without running risks, so as to disgust those *arminacs* with the place."

"Which of the brigands?" demanded Laroche.

"Michaud," said Courtecuisse. "Vaudoyer is right, right ten times over. You will see that when a keeper has been turned off into the dark, it will not be so easy to find others to stay in the sun and keep a lookout. It is not so much that they are there in the daytime, but they are there all night as well. They are fiends, that they are!"

"Wherever you go," said Granny Tonsard (and the old woman of seventy showed her parchment face, pitted with

countless holes, pierced with two green slits of eyes, and garnished with locks of dingy white hair, which straggled out from beneath a red handkerchief), "wherever you go, you come upon them, and they stop you. They look into your faggot, and if there is a single green branch in it, if there is so much as a miserable hazel switch, they will take away the faggot and take out a summons; they are as good as their word. Ah! the blackguards! there is no way of getting at them; and if they suspect you, they will soon make you undo your faggot. They are three curs yonder that are not worth two farthings; if they were put out of the way, it would not ruin France, at any rate."

"Little Vatel has not so much harm in him," said her daughter-in-law.

"*Him!*" said Laroche; "he does his work like the rest of them. He will joke right enough and laugh with you; but you stand none the better with him for that. He is the worst of the three; like Michaud, he has no heart for the poor people——"

"Monsieur Michaud has a pretty wife, all the same," said Nicolas Tonsard.

"She is with young," said the old grandmother; "but if things go on like this, there will be a queer christening when she calves."

"Oh!" cried Marie Tonsard, "it is impossible to joke with any of those *arminacs* of Parisians. They would take out a summons against you if it came to it, and no more care about you than if they had never joked——"

"So you have tried to come round them, have you?" said Courtecuisse.

"Lord love you!"

"Well," said Tonsard, looking like a man who has made up his mind, "they are men like others, we may get round them."

"My word, no," Marie went on, following out her thought,

"they do not laugh at all. What they give them, I do not know; for, after all, if that swaggerer at the hunting-lodge is married, Steingel, and Vatel, and Gaillard are not; and there is nobody else—there is not a woman in the country who would have anything to say to them."

"We shall see directly how things go at harvest and the vintage," said Tonsard.

"They will not stop the gleaning," said the grandmother.

"But I am not so sure of that," replied her daughter-in-law. "That Groison of theirs said plainly that Monsieur le Maire was about to give notice that no one should glean without a pauper's certificate, and who will give them but he himself, and you may be sure that he will not give many. He is going to forbid us to go into the fields until the last sheaf is carted——"

"Why, he has you every way, that Cuirassier," shouted Tonsard, transported with rage.

"I only heard this yesterday," said his wife; "I offered Groison a nip of brandy to get news out of him."

"There is one that is well off!" cried Vaudoyer. "They have built him a house, and found him a good wife, he has money coming in, he is dressed like a king. I myself was a rural policeman for twenty years, and I got nothing by it but colds."

"Yes, he is well off," said Godain; "he has property——"

"And we stop here like the idiots we are!" cried Vaudoyer; "let us go to Conches, at any rate, and see what is going on there; they have no more patience than the rest of us——"

"Let us go," said Laroche, who was none too steady on his feet. "If I do not put an end to one or two of them, I wish I may lose my name."

"*You!*" said Tonsard, "you would let them carry off the whole commune; but, for my own part, if any one were to lay a finger on the old woman, there is my gun, and it would not miss."

"Well," said Laroche, turning to Vaudoyer, "if they take a single one from Conches, there will be a gendarme stretched out."

"Daddy Laroche has said it!" cried Courtecuisse.

"He has said it," said Vaudoyer, "but he has not done it, and he will not do it. What good would you get by it unless you happen to want a drubbing? Life for life—it would be better to kill Michaud."

While this scene took place, Catherine Tonsard had been standing sentinel at the tavern-door, to warn the drinkers to be quiet if any one went by. In spite of their vinous gait, they dashed rather than went out of the door, and in their bellicose ardor took the road which lies for three-quarters of a mile under the park walls of the Aigues.

Conches was a thoroughly Burgundian hamlet, a collection of squalid-looking cottages, built some of brick and some of clay, along the high road which formed its single street. The hamlet looked fairly presentable when approached from the opposite side by the cross-road from Ville-aux-Fayes, for a little river flowed between the high road and the Ronquerolles woods, which succeeded to those of the Aigues along the heights, and the view was enlivened by two or three houses rather picturesquely grouped. The church and parsonage-house stood apart, a principal feature in the view from the adjacent Conches gate of the park.

The conspirators from the Grand-I-Vert caught sight of the gendarmerie through the trees in the square in front of the church, and sped along with redoubled haste. Even as they came up, three horsemen issued from the Conches gate of the park, and the peasants recognized the general, his servant, and Michaud the head-forester, who galloped off toward the square. Tonsard and his party reached the spot a few minutes later.

The delinquents, male and female, had made no sort of resistance; there they stood, encircled by five gendarmes

from Soulanges and fifteen from Ville-aux-Fayes. The whole village had turned out. The prisoners' children or mothers and fathers came and went, bringing them such things as they should need while they were in prison. The scene was curious enough; the population were evidently indignant, but they scarcely said a word, like people who had made up their minds that the thing must be. The women, old and young, were the only speakers. The children and the little girls were perched on piles of logs the better to see.

"Those hussars of the guillotine have chosen their time well! They have come on a holiday," the women were saying.

"So you let them take away your husband like that, do you? What will become of you during the next three months, the three best in the whole year, when wages are high?"

"*They* are the real thieves!" retorted the woman, with a menacing glance at the gendarmes.

"What makes you squint at us in that way?" asked the quartermaster. "You may be sure of this, that, if you indulge yourself in insults, it will not take long to settle your business."

"I didn't say anything," the woman hastily remarked, with a meek and piteous countenance.

"I might make you repent of some words that I overheard just now."

"Come, children, be quiet," said the mayor of Conches, the postmaster. "The devil! the men must do as they are told!"

"That is true, it is all the doing of the master at the Aigues. But, patience!"

At that moment the general came out into the square; his arrival produced some murmurs, but he troubled himself very little about them. He went straight to the lieutenant of gendarmerie from Ville-aux-Fayes; a few words were spoken, and a paper handed over, then the officer turned to his men—

"Release your prisoners, the general has obtained their pardon from the King."

While he spoke, General de Montcornet talked with the mayor of Conches in low tones, and after a moment the latter raised his voice and addressed the delinquents, who had looked to sleep that night in prison, and were all bewildered at finding themselves at liberty.

"You must thank Monsieur le Comte, my friends," he said; "you owe the remission of the penalties to him, he went to Paris to ask pardon for you, and obtained it in honor of the anniversary of the King's return to France—— I hope that you will behave better in future toward the general, who has behaved so kindly toward you, and that you will respect his property henceforth—— *Vive le Roi*" (Long live the King).

And the peasants shouted, "Long live the King," with enthusiasm, to avoid shouting, "Long live the count."

This scene had been planned by the general in concert with the prefect and attorney-general with a deliberate purpose. While showing firmness to stimulate the local authorities and impress the minds of the country people, the peasants were to be treated gently; so delicate did these crises appear to be. And, indeed, if any resistance had been offered, the Government would have been placed in a very awkward position. As Laroche had said, it was impossible to send a whole commune to the guillotine.

The general had asked the mayor of Conches, the lieutenant, and the quartermaster to breakfast with him. The conspirators of Blangy stayed in the tavern at Conches. The released offenders were spending the money which would otherwise have supported them in prison on drink, and naturally the Blangy folk were asked to the "wedding." Country people call every rejoicing a "wedding," and they eat and drink and quarrel and fight and go home again drunk and disabled, and this is called a "wedding."

The general took his guests, not by the Conches gate, whence he had issued, but by the forest, in order to show them the damage that had been done, so that they might judge of the importance of the question.

At noon, when Rigou was returning home from Blangy, the count and countess and their guests were finishing breakfast in the splendid room described in Blondet's letter to Nathan, the room on which Bouret's luxurious tastes had left its impress.

"It would be a great pity to give up such a place," said the lieutenant. He had been over the Aigues, and had seen it all for the first time; and now, looking about him over the rim of a glass of champagne, he observed the admirable series of unclad nymphs who supported the ceiling.

"Wherefore we shall defend ourselves to the death," said Blondet.

The lieutenant gave his quartermaster a glance which seemed to recommend silence to that officer. "Suppose that I say that the general's enemies are not all among the fields," he began.

The gallant lieutenant was softened by the splendid breakfast, the magnificent plate, the imperial luxury which had replaced the luxury of the opera-girl; and Blondet's wit had been as stimulating as the soldierly bumpers which they had drained.

"How is it that I have enemies?" asked the astonished general.

"So kind as he is," added the countess.

"He and our mayor, Monsieur Gaubertin, parted in anger, and, for the sake of a quiet life, he should be reconciled with him."

"With *him!*" cried the count; "then you do not know that he was my steward, and a dishonest scamp?"

"He is not a scamp now," said the lieutenant; "he is the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes."

"Our lieutenant is a clever man," said Blondet; "it is plain that a mayor is by nature honest."

The lieutenant, seeing from the count's remark that it was impossible to open his eyes, said no more on that subject.

VI.

THE FOREST AND THE HARVEST.

The scene at Conches had a good effect; the count's faithful keepers saw that no green wood was taken out of the forest of the Aigues; but the forest had been so thoroughly exploited by the peasants for twenty years that there was nothing but young growth left, and, dead-wood being scarce, they were busy killing the trees against the coming winter. The means used were extremely simple, and could only be discovered some time afterward.

Tonsard sent his mother into the forest; the keeper used to see her come in, and, knowing the way by which she would go out, would lie in wait to inspect her faggot. As a matter of fact, he always found nothing in it but sear brushwood, fallen branches, and withered and broken boughs, and Granny Tonsard used to groan and pity herself because at her age she had to go so far to pick up such a miserable bundle of sticks. But she did not say that she had been in the dense thickets, where the saplings grew, grubbing at the base of the young trees and stripping off a ring of bark close to the ground, covering up her work with moss and leaves, and leaving all apparently as it was before. It was impossible to detect this ring-shaped incision, made not with a billhook, but by tearing away the bark in such a manner that the damage seemed to be the work of the cockchafer grub, a wood-gnawing insect pest known by the various names of "the Turk," the wood-worm, and wood-maggot in different parts of the country. This grub lives upon bark, lodging itself between

the bark and the wood to gnaw its way underneath. If the tree is large enough, and the grub fails to make the circuit before its transformation into the chrysalis stage, it is safe, for so long as the bark is not ringed round, the tree can grow. To show the intimate connection between entomology, agriculture, horticulture, and vegetable production generally, it is sufficient to point out that Latreille, the Comte Dejean, and Klug of Berlin, Géné of Turin, and other great naturalists have discovered that nearly all insects feed on vegetable growths. There are twenty-seven thousand species of plant-eating coleoptera in M. Dejean's published catalogue; and in spite of the eager research of entomologists of all countries, there are still an enormous number of species unidentified in their triple transformations. Not only has every wild plant its particular insect pest, but every vegetable product, however modified by human industry, has its special insect. The hemp and flax which clothes human creatures and goes to the making of ropes to hang them, after covering the backs of an army, is transformed into writing-paper; and those who read or write much are familiar with the habits of the "silver fish," an insect marvelous in its appearance and genesis, which passes through its mysterious transformations in a ream of carefully kept white paper. You behold the creature skip nimbly in his splendid raiment, glittering like talc or spar; it is a flying "silver fish."

The wood-maggot is the despair of the cultivator. In its earlier stages it hides below ground, safe out of reach of administrative circulars; so that the authorities can only order a series of Sicilian vespers when it emerges as a full-grown cockchafer. If people knew the whole extent of the damage done by cockchafers and caterpillars, they would pay more attention to the prefect's injunctions. Holland all but perished because the teredo burrowed in her dykes, and science has not yet discovered the final transformation of the teredo, nor the earlier metamorphoses of the cochineal insect.

In all probability the ergot of rye is a seething insect population, though scientific genius can only discern slight movement in its particles.

So as the peasants waited for harvest and vintage some fifty old women imitated the work of the cockchafer grub at the foot of five or six hundred trees which should never bear leaves again and stand up, dead and stark, in the spring. All the trees were purposely chosen in out-of-the-way spots, so that the peasants might the better secure the spoil of dead branches. Who told them the secret? No one in so many words; but Courtecuisse had complained one day at the tavern that an elm-tree in his garden was dying at the top; there was something the matter with the tree; and he, Courtecuisse, suspected that it was a wood-maggot; he knew well what a wood-maggot was, and he knew that when a tree had a wood-maggot in it, that tree was as good as dead. Then he showed his audience in the tavern how the maggot went round the tree.

The old women did their work of destruction as mysteriously and as deftly as pixies, urged on by the exasperating measures taken by the mayor of Blangy. Other mayors had received instructions to follow the example set them. The rural police made public proclamation that no one would be allowed to glean in cornfields or vineyards without a certificate from the mayor of each commune; the prefect sent down an example of the certificate required to the sub-prefecture, and the sub-prefect supplied the mayors with a pattern copy apiece. The great landowners of the district admired Montcornet's behavior, and the prefect said that if other great personages would do likewise, and live on their estates, the result would be of the happiest; for such measures as these, added the prefect, ought to be taken all over the country; they should be uniformly adopted and modified by benevolence and such enlightened philanthropy as that of General de Montcornet.

And the general and the countess, with the help of the Abbé

Brossette, were, in fact, endeavoring to help the people. They had thought out their plans carefully; they desired to show in a practical and unmistakable fashion that those who were plundering them would do better for themselves by earning an honest livelihood. They gave out hemp to be spun, and paid for the work, and the countess had the thread woven into hessian for kitchen cloths, dusters, and aprons, and shirts for the very poor. The count undertook improvements, drawing all his laborers from the neighboring communes. The details were left to Sibilet, and the Abbé Brossette informed the countess of cases of poverty, and brought them under her notice. Mme. de Montcornet held her assizes of mercy in the great hall above the steps. It was a beautiful vestibule, paved with marble red and white; an ornamental majolica stove stood in it, and the long benches were covered with red velvet.

Thither one morning before the harvest came old Granny Tonsard with her granddaughter Catherine; she had a terrible confession to make touching the honor of a poor but honest family. While she spoke, Catherine stood like a guilty thing, and then in her turn she told of her "strait." Nobody knew of it but her grandmother, she said; her mother would drive her out of the house; her father, a man of honor, would kill her. If she had but a thousand francs, there was a poor laborer named Godain who was willing to marry her; he knew all, and he loved her like a brother. He would buy a bit of waste-land and build a cottage upon it. It was touching. The countess promised to set aside a sum of money, the price of a sacrificed whim, for a marriage portion. The two happy marriages of Michaud and Groison had encouraged her in match-making; and, beside, this wedding was to set a good example to the peasants, and a higher standard of conduct. So a marriage was arranged between Godain and Catherine by means of Mme. de Montcornet's money.

Another time it was Granny Bonnébault, a horrible old

woman, who lived in a cabin between the Conches gate and the village, who came with a load of hanks of spun hemp.

"The countess has worked miracles," said the abbé, full of hope for the moral improvement of these savages. "That woman used to do a great deal of damage in your woods; but now, why should she go? She spins from morning to night; she is busy, and earning money."

The country was quiet. Groison brought in satisfactory reports, the wood-stealing seemed to be almost at an end; perhaps, indeed, a real transformation might have been wrought, but for Gaubertin's rancorous greed, but for the petty cabals of the "best society" of Soulanges, but for Rigou's intrigues, which fanned the flames of hate and crime smouldering in the minds of the peasants of the valley.

The foresters, however, complained that they found many branches gashed with the billhook in the forest; evidently somebody intended to find dead-wood for winter fuel. But their efforts to discover those persons were fruitless. The count with Groison's assistance had given paupers' certificates to the thirty or forty who really needed them; but other communes had been less particular. The count was determined that after his late clemency in the matter of the arrests at Conches, the regulations as to the harvest must be strictly enforced, for gleaning had degenerated into robbery. With the three farms which he had let on lease he did not concern himself; but he had half a dozen smaller farms which paid rent in kind on the system of division of produce between landlord and tenant, and on these he meant to take his stand. He had given notice that any one who should enter a field before the last sheaf had been carted away should be prosecuted; an order which interested no other farmer in the commune; for Rigou, who knew the country well, used to let his arable land in little plots and on short leases to men who reaped their own crops themselves; he stipulated that his rents should be paid in grain, the abuse of gleaning did not

affect him. Nor did it affect the remaining farmers, for peasant proprietors let each other alone.

The count had instructed Sibilet to see that his tenants cut their corn in succession, and to put all the harvesters to work at once on the same farm, so that it might be easier to keep a watch upon them. This plan had been suggested by Groison, who was to superintend the influx of gleaners into every field. The count went in person with Michaud to see it in operation.

Town-dwellers would never imagine what the gleaning means to country people; indeed, the French peasant's passion for gleaning is quite inexplicable, for women will leave well-paid work to pick up stray ears in the fields. The corn gleaned in this way appears to have peculiar virtue in it, and the provision thus made for the more substantial part of their daily food has an immense attraction for them. Mothers bring toddling children with their older girls and boys; the most decrepit old people drag themselves to the fields; and, as might be expected, those who are not really poor will feign poverty and go a-gleaning in rags.

The count and Michaud had ridden out to watch the onslaught of the tattered crowd upon the first field of the first farm.

It was ten o'clock on a hot August morning, the cloudless sky above was blue as periwinkle blossoms, the earth was burning, the wheat fields blazed like flame, the sun beat down on the hard soil which reflected the heat up in waves to scorch the faces of the reapers who, with shirts wet with perspiration, toiled in silence, only stopping now and again to drink from their round, loaf-shaped stone water-bottles, cruses with two ears, and a rough spout stoppered by a peg of willow.

At the edge of the stubble-field, where the last sheaves were being piled on the wagons, stood a hundred human beings, who, in their wretchedness, surely left the most hideous conceptions of a Murillo or a Teniers far behind. Here were

the most daring pictures of beggary, and faces such as a Callot, the poet of misery in its most fantastic phases, has drawn to the life. Here were the limbs of bronze, the bald heads, the strangely degraded tints, the tattered greasy rags —darned, patched, stained, discolored, worn down to the bare threads. Here, in short, the painter's ideal of the trappings of misery was overtopped, even as those faces, in their anxiety, greed, imbecility, idiocy, and savagery, surpassed the immortal creations of the princes of color, in that they possessed the immortal advantage of Nature over Art. There stood old crones, with red lashless eyelids, stretching out their turkey's throats like pointers putting up a partridge; there stood children mute as sentinels on guard, and little girls stamping with impatience like animals waiting to be let out to pasture; every characteristic of infancy and age was obliterated by a common frenzy of greed in all faces; all coveted their neighbor's goods, which long abuse had made their own. Their eyes glared, they made many threatening gestures, but none of them spoke in the presence of the count, the policeman, and the head-forester. The landowner, the farmer, the worker, and the pauper were all represented there, and the social problem behind the scene was outlined very clearly, for hunger had summoned those threatening figures. Every hard feature, every hollow in their faces was brought into relief by the sunlight which scorched their bare dusty feet; some of the children had no clothing but a ragged blouse, and their flaxen curls were full of bits of wood, straw, and hay, and here and there a woman held by the hand a mere baby which could scarcely toddle, to be put down presently to crawl along the furrows.

This dreadful picture was intolerable to an old soldier with a kind heart. The general spoke to Michaud.

"It hurts me to see them. If we did not know all that was involved in these measures, it would be impossible to persist."

"If every landowner were to follow your example, general, and live on his estate, and do good as you are doing, I do not say that there would be no poor, for we have the poor always with us, but there would be no one who could not make an honest living."

"The mayors of Conches, Cerneux, and Soulanges have sent us their paupers," said Groison, who had been verifying the certificates; "they ought not to do that."

"No," said the count, "but our paupers will go to glean in their communes; it is enough for the present if they do not help themselves from the sheaves. We must take one step at a time," and he went away.

"Did you hear that?" asked Granny Tonsard, turning to Bonnébault's mother. The count happening to raise his voice a little over the last words, they reached the ears of one of the two old crones who were posted on the road by the edge of the field.

"Yes, that is not all; a tooth to-day, an ear to-morrow; if they could invent a sauce for it, they would eat us up; a calf's liver or a Christian's would be all the same to them," said Granny Bonnébault.

She lifted up her malignant features as the general passed; but in the twinkling of an eye a hypocritical expression of honeyed amiability overspread her face, and with an ingratiating grin she hastily made a deep curtsey.

"What! are you gleaning too, when my wife has put you in the way of earning plenty of money?"

"Eh! God keep you in health, my dear gentleman! But, you see, that lad of mine eats everything up, and I be forced to hide away this little mite of corn to have bread to eat in the winter. So I be gleaning again for a bit—it all helps!" said the old woman.

The gleaners made little that year. When the farmers and crofters knew that they would be supported, they cut their corn carefully and looked after the sheaves, and saw that the

fields were clear, in such a sort that there was, at any rate, less of the open robbery of previous harvests.

This year, too, the gleaners looked in vain for the wheat which always made a certain proportion of their bundles; and impostors and paupers, who had forgotten their pardon at Conches, cherished in consequence a smothered feeling of discontent, embittered in tavern talk by the Tonsards, by Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Laroche, Vaudoyer, Godain, and their following. Matters grew worse after the vintage, for no one was allowed to go into the vineyards until the grapes were all cut and the vines had been very closely picked over; Sibilet had seen to that. This exasperated the peasants to the last degree; but when there is so great a gulf set between the class which rises in menace and the class which is threatened, words are not carried across it; deeds are the only sign of the matters which are brewing, and the malcontents betake themselves to work underground like moles.

The fair at Soulanges went off quietly enough save for some amenities that passed between the best society and the second-rate, thanks to the queen's uneasy despotism. It was intolerable to her that the fair Euphémie Plissoud should reign over the brilliant Lupin's heart, when his fickle affections should have been centred upon herself.

The count and countess had appeared neither at the fair nor at the Tivoli, and this was counted as a crime by the Soudrys and Gaubertins and their adherents. It was all pride and superciliousness, so they said in Mme. Soudry's drawing-room.

Meanwhile the countess was filling up the blank left by Émile's absence by the great interest which noble natures take in the good which they try to do; and the count threw no less zeal into the improvements on his estate, which he intended to effect a corresponding improvement both material and moral in the people of the district. Little by little, with the help of the Abbé Brossette, Mme. de Montcornet came to

have an accurate knowledge of the circumstances of the poor families, of their requirements and their means of subsistence, and learned how much thoughtful care was needed to give them assistance by helping them to work, lest they should be encouraged in lazy or vicious habits.

The countess had placed Geneviève Niseron in a convent, under the pretext of having her taught to do needlework sufficiently well to be employed in her household; but in reality Geneviève was sent out of reach of Nicolas Tonsard, whom Rigou had managed to exempt from military service. The countess thought, moreover, that a devout education, and the guarded seclusion of the convent, would sooner or later quell the ardent passions of a precocious child whose fiery Montenegrin blood seemed at times to threaten to break into a flame which might consume her faithful Olympe Michaud's happiness.

So there was tranquillity at the Aigues. The count, reassured by Michaud and lulled into security by Sibilet, congratulated himself upon his firmness, and thanked his wife for contributing by her beneficence to the great result of their tranquillity. As for the sale of the timber, the general held the question over till he could return to Paris and arrange in person with wood merchants. He had not the slightest idea of the way in which the business was carried on, and was far from suspecting the extent of Gaubertin's influence along the Yonne, or that the mayor of Ville-aux-Fayes supplied the larger part of Paris with fuel.

VII.

THE GREYHOUND.

About the middle of September, Émile came back to the Aigues. He had gone to Paris to arrange for the publication of a book, and now he meant to rest and to think over the

work which he was planning for the winter. At the Aigues the wearied journalist disappeared, and Émile Blondet became once more frank, fresh-hearted, as in the days of his early manhood.

"What a beautiful nature!" said the count and countess when they spoke of him.

Men accustomed to knock about in the world, to see the seamy side of life, and to gather in experience of all kinds without restraint, make an oasis in their hearts, and leave their own evil tendencies and those of others outside it. Within a narrow charmed circle they become saints in miniature; they have a woman's sensitiveness, with their whole souls they strive for a momentary realization of their ideal, and for the one soul in the world who worships them they raise themselves to angelic heights. Nor are they playing a comedy. They turn the inner self out to grass, as it were; they crave to have the stains of mud brushed off, their bruises healed, and their wounds bound. When Émile Blondet came to the Aigues he left malice behind, and with it most of his wit, not an epigram did he utter, he was as mild as a lamb and suavely platonic.

"He is such a good young fellow that I miss him when he is not here," the general used to say. "I should dearly like him to make his fortune and give up that Paris life."

Never had the glorious landscape and the park at the Aigues been more luxuriantly beautiful than in those September days. In the earliest autumn weather, when earth is weary of bringing forth her fruits and fills the air in the empty fields and orchards with the delicious scent of leaves, the forests are the most wonderful sight of all, for then they begin to take bronze-green hues and warm ochre tints, to blend in the fair tapestry beneath which they hide, as if to defy the coming cold of winter.

Earth in the spring looked gay and joyous, a dark-haired maid who hopes and looks forward; Earth in the autumn,

grown melancholy and mild, is a fair-haired woman who remembers. The grass grows golden, the heads of the autumn flowers are crowned with pale petals, the white daisies look up seldom now from the lawn, and you see the purplish-green calices instead. There is yellow color everywhere. The trees cast thinner and darker shadows; the sun, slanting lower already, steals under them to leave faint gleams of orange color and long luminous shafts, which vanish swiftly over the ground like the trailing robes of women departing.

On the morning of the second day after his arrival, Émile stood at the window of his room, which gave upon one of the terraces from which there was a beautiful view. The countess' apartments were likewise upon the terrace, and faced the view toward Blangy and the forests. The pond (which nearer Paris would have been styled a lake) and its long channel were almost out of sight, but the silver spring which rose in the wood near the hunting-lodge crossed the lawn like a silken ribbon covered with bright spangles of sand.

Beyond the park palings lay fields where cattle were grazing, and little properties, full of walnut and apple-trees, inclosed by hedges, stood out against the hillside, covered with the walls and houses and cultivated land of Blangy, and, higher yet, ridges covered with tall forest trees rose up stepwise to the heights which framed the whole picture.

The countess had come out upon the terrace to see her flowers, which filled the air with their morning fragrance. She wore a loose cambric wrapper, through which her pretty shoulders sent a faint rose flush; a dainty cap sat piquantly on her hair, which strayed rebelliously from beneath it; her little foot shone through the transparent stocking; and, whenever the wind stirred, it fluttered her thin dressing-gown, giving glimpses of an embroidered cambric petticoat carelessly fastened over her corset.

"Oh, are you there?" asked she.

"Yes——"

"What are you looking at?"

"What a question to ask! You have snatched me from the contemplation of nature. Tell me, countess, will you take a walk in the woods this morning before breakfast?"

"What an idea! You know that I hold walks in abhorrence."

"We will only walk a very short way. I will drive you in the tilbury, and Joseph can come with us to look after it. You never set foot in your forest, and I notice something odd in it: little groups of trees here and there have turned the color of Florentine bronze; the leaves are withering——"

"Very well, I will dress at once."

"We should not start for two hours! No. Take a shawl and a hat—— and thick shoes, that is all that is really necessary."

"You must always have your way—— I will come back in one moment."

"General, we are going out, will you come with us?" called Blondet, going away to waken the count, who replied by the grunt of a man still locked in morning slumber.

Fifteen minutes later the tilbury was moving slowly along one of the broad avenues through the park, followed at a distance by a stalwart servant on horseback.

It was a true September morning. Spaces of dark-blue sky shone in a cloud-dappled heaven, as if they, and not the clouds, were flitting over the ether of space. Long streaks of ultramarine blue, alternating with folds of cloud, lay like ribs of sand low down on the horizon, and higher up, above the forest, a greenish tint overspread the sky. Earth lay warm under the cloudy covering, like a woman just awakened. The forest scents were mingled with the scent of the ploughed land, a wild savor in the steaming fragrance of the soil. The bell was ringing for the Angelus at Blangy; the notes, blended with the mysterious sound of the wind in the woods, made har-

mony with the silence. Here and there thin white mists were rising.

Olympe Michaud, seeing these fair preparations for the day, took it into her head to go out with her husband, who was obliged to give an order to one of the keepers who lived a short distance away. The Soulanges doctor had recommended her to take walks without overtiring herself, but she was afraid of the heat at noon and did not care to venture out in the evening. Michaud went with her, and took his favorite dog, a mouse-colored greyhound spotted with white; greedy, like all greyhounds, and full of faults, like all animals who know they are loved and have the gift of pleasing.

So it happened that when the tilbury reached the hunting-lodge and the countess inquired after Mme. Michaud's health, she was told that Olympe had gone into the forest with her husband.

"This weather inspires the same thought in every one," said Blondet, turning the horse into one of the six roads at random. "By-the-by, Joseph, do you know the forest?"

"Yes, sir."

And away they went. The avenue which they had chosen was one of the loveliest in the forest; after a little while it swerved round and became a narrow winding track. The sun shone down into it through the chinks in the leafy roof, which closed it in like a green bower; the breeze brought the scent of thyme and lavender and wild peppermint, and sounds of dead branches and leaves falling to earth with a rustling sigh; the drops of dew scattered over the leaves and grass were shaken and fell as the light carriage went past. The farther the two travelers went, the deeper they penetrated into the mysterious fantasies of the forest; into cool depths where the leaves grow in the damp and darkness, and the light that enters turns to velvet as it dies away; through clearer spaces of graceful birch-trees gathered about their over-lord, the Hercules of the forest, a hundred-year-old beech; through

assemblies of grand tree-trunks, knotted, mossy, pale-colored, riven with deep furrows, tracing gigantic blurred shadows over the ground. Along the side of the way they took grew a border of thin grass and delicate flowers. The streams had singing voices. Surely it is an unspeakable delight to drive along forest tracks, slippery with moss, when the woman by your side clings to you in real or simulated terror at every up and down of the road. You feel the fresh warmth, the involuntary or deliberate pressure, of her arm, the weight of a soft white shoulder, she begins to smile if you tell her that she is bringing you to a standstill, and the horse seems to understand these interruptions and looks to right and left.

The countess grew dreamy. The sight of this forest world, so vigorous in its effects, so unfamiliar and so grand, was new to her. She leaned back in the tilbury and gave herself up to the pleasure of being beside Émile. His eyes were occupied, his heart spoke to hers, and a voice within her gave response. Émile stole a glance at her, and enjoyed her mood of meditative dreaming. The ribbon-strings of her hood had come unfastened, and given to the morning wind the silken curls of her fair hair in luxuriant abandonment. They drove on as chance directed, and in consequence were confronted by a closed gate across the road. They had not the key; and Joseph, when summoned, proved to be likewise unprovided.

"Very well, let us walk. Joseph shall stay here with the tilbury; we shall easily find our way back."

Émile and the countess plunged into the forest and reached a spot whence they saw a little landscape set in the woods, such a scene as you often see in a great forest. Twenty years ago the charcoal-burners had cleared the space for their charcoal kiln, burning everything for a considerable area round about, and the trees had not grown again. But in twenty years Nature had had time to make a flower garden there; and, even as a painter will paint some one picture for himself,

she had made a garden of her own. Tall trees grew round about that delicious plaisance; their crests drooped over it in a deep fringe, like a great canopy above the couch where the goddess reposes.

The charcoal-burners had beaten a path to the edge of a pool of water, always clear and full to the brim. The path still existed, tempting you to follow it by a coquettish bend, till suddenly it was rent across, displaying a sheer surface of earth, where myriads of tree roots, exposed to the air, grew interwoven like canvas for tapestry work. Short green turf surrounded the lonely pool, a few willows and an aspen here and there spread a light veil of shadow over a bank of soft grass, laid down by some meditative or ease-loving charcoal-burner. Frogs leap and tadpoles swim undisturbed, moor-hens and water-fowl come and go, a hare flies from your presence, the delightful bathing-place, decked with the tallest of green rushes, is at your disposal. The trees above your head take many shapes; here a trunk raises its head like a boa-constrictor, there the beeches shoot up straight and tall as Grecian columns, to their green crests. Slugs and snails promenade in peace, a tench shows its nose above the surface of the pool, a squirrel eyes you curiously.

When Émile and the countess sat down to rest at last, some bird broke the silence with an autumn song—a song of fare-well to which all the other birds listened, one of those songs which awaken passionate response in the listener and appeal to all the senses.

"How silent it is!" said the countess; she felt moved, and lowered her voice as if she feared to trouble that peace.

They gazed at the green patches on the water, little worlds of growing and living organisms, and bade each other see the lizard basking in the sun; at their approach it fled, justifying its nickname—the "friend of man." "Which proves how well he knows man!" commented Émile. They watched the bolder frogs return to the bed of cresses by the water's

edge, and show their eyes sparkling like carbuncles. The sense of the simple and tender mystery of nature passed little by little into these two souls, on whom the artificialities of the world had palled, and steeped them in a mood of contemplative emotion—— when suddenly Blondet shuddered and leaned toward the countess to whisper—

"Do you hear that?"

"What?"

"A strange sound."

"Just like these literary people, who stay in their studies and know nothing of the country. That is a woodpecker making a hole in a tree. I will wager that you do not even know the most curious thing about the woodpecker. Every time that he gives a tap (and he gives hundreds of taps to hollow out an oak twice as thick as your body), he goes round to the back of it to see if he has pierced a hole through."

"That noise, dear lecturer on natural history, was not made by a bird; there was that indescribable something in it which reveals a human intelligence at work."

The countess was seized with a panic of fear. She fled across the little wild garden, reached the path again, and seemed bent on flight from the forest.

"What is the matter?" cried Blondet, hurrying after her anxiously.

"I thought that I saw eyes," she said, when they had gained one of the paths by which they had come to the clearing made by the charcoal-burners.

Even as she spoke, they both heard another sound—the dying moan of some creature, a stifled sound, as if its throat had been suddenly cut. The countess' fears were redoubled; she fled so swiftly that Blondet could scarcely keep pace with her. On and on she fled, like a will-of-the wisp; she did not hear Émile's cry—"It is a mistake!" Still she ran, and Blondet, instead of overtaking her, fell more and more behind.

At length they came upon Michaud walking with his wife

on his arm. Émile was panting, and the countess so much out of breath that it was some time before they could speak and explain what had happened. Michaud, like Blondet, scoffed at the lady's fears, and put the straying pair in the way to find the tilbury. When they reached the bar across the road, Olympe Michaud called to the dog.

"Prince! Prince!" shouted the forester. He whistled and whistled again, but no dog appeared. Then Émile mentioned the mysterious sounds with which the adventure began.

"My wife heard the sound," said Michaud, "and I laughed at her."

"Some one has killed Prince!" cried the countess. "I am sure of it now; they must have cut his throat at a stroke, for the sound which I heard was the dying groan of some animal."

"The devil!" said Michaud; "this is worth looking into."

Émile and the forester left the two women with Joseph and the horses, and turned back into the cleared space. They went down to the pond, searched among the knolls, and found not a sign nor a trace of the dog. Blondet was the first to climb the bank again; and noticing a tree with withered leaves, he called Michaud's attention to it, and determined to examine it for himself. The two men struck out a straight line through the forest, avoiding the fallen trunks, dense holly thickets, and brambles in their way, and reached the tree in question.

"It is a fine elm," said Michaud, "but there is a wood-worm at the root of it—a worm has ringed the bark at the foot." He stooped down and lifted up the bark: "There, only see what work!"

"There are a good many wood-worms in this forest of yours," said Blondet.

As he spoke, Michaud saw a red drop a few paces away,

and farther yet his greyhound's head. He heaved a sigh. "The rascals!—my lady was right."

Blondet and Michaud went up to the body. The countess was right. The dog's throat had been cut. Prince had been coaxed by a bit of pickled pork to prevent him from barking, for the morsel lay half swallowed between the tongue and the palate.

"Poor brute, his weakness caused his death."

"Exactly the way with princes," said Blondet.

"Some one was here who did not want to be found here, and made off," said Michaud, "so there is something seriously wrong. And yet I see no branches broken nor trees cut down."

Blondet and the forester began a careful investigation, looking over every inch of ground before setting down their feet. At last Émile found that some one had been kneeling under a tree a few paces away, the grass was trodden down and bent, and there were two hollow dints in the moss.

"Some one has been kneeling here," he said, "and it was a woman, for a man's legs would not have crushed so much grass below the knees; look at the outline of the petticoat."

The forester scanned the foot of the tree, and saw that a wood-maggot had begun its work; but there was no trace of the grub itself, with the tough glistening skin, the brown-tipped scales, the tail already something like that of the cockchafer, and the head provided with antennæ and two strong jaws with which the insect cuts the roots of plants.

"Now, my dear fellow, I can understand why there are such a quantity of dead trees in the forest. I noticed them this morning from the terrace at the castle, and came here on purpose to discover the cause of that phenomenon. The worms are stirring, but it is your peasants who creep out of the woods."

The head-forester let fly an oath. Then, followed by Blondet, he hurried to find the countess, and begged her to

take his wife home. He himself took Joseph's horse, leaving the man to walk back to the castle, and galloped off to intercept the woman who had killed his dog, and if possible to surprise her with the blood-stained billhook and the tool with which she made the holes in the trees. Blondet took his place between Mme. de Montcornet and Olympe Michaud, and told them of Prince's end, and of the miserable discovery to which it had led.

"Oh, dear!" cried the countess, "let us tell the general about it before breakfast, or anger may kill him."

"I will break the news to him," said Blondet.

"They have killed the dog!" cried Olympe, drying her tears.

"You must have been very fond of Prince, dear child, to shed tears for a dog like this," said the countess.

"I look upon Prince's death simply as a warning of trouble to come; I am afraid lest anything should happen to my husband."

"How they have spoiled this morning for us!" said the countess, with an adorable little pout.

"How they are spoiling the country!" Olympe said sadly.

At the park gates they came upon the general.

"Where can you have been?" asked he.

"You shall hear directly," said Blondet mysteriously, as he helped Mme. Michaud to alight. The general was struck by the sadness in Olympe's face.

A few minutes later, Blondet and the general stood on the terrace.

"You have plenty of moral courage," said Émile Blondet; "you will not fly into a passion, will you?"

"No," said the general, "but out with it, or I shall think that you want to laugh at me."

"Do you see those trees with the dead leaves on them?"

"Yes."

"And those others that are turning a lighter color?"

"Yes."

"Very well, those are so many dead trees; so many trees killed by the peasants whom you thought that you had won over by your kindness;" and Blondet told the tale of that morning's adventures.

The general grew so pale that Blondet was alarmed.

"Come," he cried, "curse and swear, fly into a rage! repression may perhaps be even worse for you than an outbreak of anger."

"I shall go and smoke," said the count, and off he went to his summer-house.

Michaud came as they sat at breakfast; he had found nobody. The count had sent for Sibilet, and he also appeared.

"Monsieur Sibilet and Monsieur Michaud, let it be known in the right quarters that I will give a thousand francs to anybody who will enable me to detect those who injure my trees at their work. The tool with which they work must be discovered, and the place where it was purchased, and—I have a plan ready."

"Those people never sell themselves when a crime has been deliberately committed for their own profit," said Sibilet; "for there is no denying that this diabolical invention has been deliberately planned——"

"Yes. But a thousand francs means one or two acres of land."

"We will try," said Sibilet. "For fifteen hundred francs we shall find a traitor, I will answer for it, more particularly if we keep his secret."

"But we must all, and I most of all, act as though we knew nothing about it," said the count. "It should rather be you who discover it without my knowledge; they must not know that I know, or we may fall victims to some new combination. More caution is needed with these brigands than with the enemy in time of war."

"Why, this is the enemy," said Blondet. Sibilet gave

him a quick furtive glance; he evidently understood the remark and he went.

"I do not like that Sibilet of yours," Blondet continued, when he had heard the man go out of the house; "he is not to be trusted."

"I have had no reason to complain of him so far," said the general.

Blondet went to write some letters. He had quite lost the careless high spirits of his first visit, and looked anxious and preoccupied. He had no vague forebodings like Mme. Michaud, his was a clear vision of inevitable troubles. To himself he said—

"All this will come to a bad end; and if the general does not make up his mind at once to retire from a battlefield where he is outnumbered, there will be many victims. Who knows whether he himself or his wife will come out safe and sound? Good heavens! to think that she should be exposed to such risks, so adorable, so devoted, so perfect as she is. And he thinks that he loves her! Well, I will share their peril, and, if I cannot save them, I will perish with them."

VIII.

RUSTIC VIRTUES.

At nightfall Marie Tonsard was sitting on the edge of a culvert on the Soulanges road, waiting for Bonnébault, who, according to his usual custom, had spent the day at the café. She heard him while he was yet some distance away, and knew from his footsteps that he was drunk and that he had lost at play, for he used to sing when he had been winning.

"Is that you, Bonnébault?"

"Yes, little girl."

"What is the matter?"

"I have lost twenty-five francs, and they may wring my neck twenty-five times before I shall find them."

"Well, now, there is a way for us to make five hundred," she said in his ear.

"Oh! yes, somebody to be killed; but I have a mind to live——"

"Just hold your tongue. Vaudoyer will give us the money if you will let them catch your mother at a tree——"

"I would rather kill a man than sell my mother. There is your own Grandmother Tonsard; why don't you give her up?"

"If I tried it, father would be angry; he would put a stop to the game."

"That is true. All the same, my mother shall not go to prison. Poor old soul! she finds me clothes and victuals, how, I do not know. Send her to prison, and by my own doing! I should have neither heart nor bowels. No, no. I shall tell her this evening to leave off barking the trees, lest some one else should sell her."

"Well, father will do as he pleases; I shall tell him that there are five hundred francs to be made, and he will ask grandmother whether she will or not. They would never put an old woman of seventy in prison; and if they do, she will be more comfortable there than in the garret."

"Five hundred francs! I will speak to mother about it," said Bonnébault. "After all, if that arrangement gives me the money, I will let her have some of it to live upon in prison. She can spin to amuse herself, she will be well fed and have a sound roof over her, and much less trouble than she has at Conches. Good-by till to-morrow, little girl—I have not time to talk to you."

Next morning at five o'clock, as soon as it was light, Bonnébault and his mother rapped at the door of the Grand-I-Vert; old Granny Tonsard was the only person out of bed.

"Marie!" shouted Bonnébault, "it is a bargain!"

"Is that yesterday's affair about the trees?" asked Granny Tonsard. "That is all settled, they are going to catch *me*."

"You, indeed! My boy has Monsieur Rigou's promise for an acre of land for the money;" and the two old women quarreled as to which of them should be sold by their children. The sound of the dispute roused the house; Tonsard and Bonnébault each took the part of his parent.

"Pull straws for it," suggested La Tonsard, the daughter-in-law.

The straws decided in favor of the Grand-I-Vert.

Three days later, at daybreak, the gendarmes arrested Granny Tonsard in the depths of the forest, and took her away to Ville-aux-Fayes. She was caught in the act by the head-forester, the keepers, and the rural policeman. In her possession they found a cheap file, with which she made an incision in the tree, and a bradawl, with which she made the ring-shaped gash to imitate the insect's track. In the indictment it was stated that this treacherous operation had been performed upon no fewer than sixty trees within a radius of five hundred paces, and Granny Tonsard was committed for trial at the Assizes at Auxerre.

When Michaud saw the old crone at the foot of the tree, he could not help exclaiming—

"These are the people on whom Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse heap kindnesses! My word, if my lady would listen to me, she would not portion that Tonsard girl, who is even more worthless than the grandmother."

The old woman turned her gray eyes on Michaud with a viperous glance. And, in fact, when the count knew the author of the crime, he forbade his wife to give anything to Catherine Tonsard.

"And so much the better, Monsieur le Comte," said Sibilet, "for it has come to my knowledge that Godain bought that field of his three days before Catherine came to speak to my lady. The pair of them evidently counted on the effect

of the scene and on her ladyship's compassion. Catherine is quite capable of putting herself in her present case on purpose to ask for the money, for Godain counts for nothing in the business——"

"What people!" said Blondet; "our black sheep in Paris are saints in comparison——"

"Ah, sir," Sibilet broke in, "all sorts of horrible things are done from mercenary motives hereabout. Do you know who it was that betrayed the Tonsard?"

"No——"

"Her granddaughter, Marie. Her sister is going to be married, and she is jealous, and so, to settle herself——"

"It is shocking!" said the count. "Then would they commit a murder?"

"Yes," said Sibilet, "and for a mere nothing. That sort of people set little value on life; they are tired of continual toil. Ah! sir, in out-of-the-way country places things are no better than in Paris, but you would not believe it."

"Then be kind and benevolent to them," said the countess.

On the evening after Granny Tonsard's arrest, Bonnébault looked in at the Grand-I-Vert, and found the whole Tonsard family in great jubilation.

"Yes, yes," said he, "you may rejoice! I have just heard from Vaudoyer that the countess is going back on her promise of Godain's thousand francs. Her husband will not allow her to give the money."

"It is that rascal Michaud who gave the advice," said Tonsard; "mother overheard him. She told me about it at Ville-aux-Fayes when I went over to take all her things and some money. Well and good, let her keep her thousand francs; our five hundred francs will go part of the way toward paying for Godain's land, and we will have our revenge, Godain, you and I. Aha! so Michaud interferes in our little affairs, does he? He will get more harm than good that way.

What does it matter to him, I ask you? Did it happen in his woods? And, beside, it was he that raised all this racket. That is as true as 'tis that he found out the trick that day when mother slit the dog's gullet. And how if I in my turn begin to meddle in matters at the castle? How if I bring the general word that his wife goes out walking in the woods of a morning with a young man, no matter for the dew; one had need have warm feet to do that——"

"The general! the general!" broke in Courtecuisse, "any one can do as they like with *him;* it is Michaud who puts him up to things, a fussy fellow who does not understand his own trade. Things went quite otherwise in my time."

"Ah!" said Tonsard, "those were fine times for us all, Vaudoyer, were they not?"

"The fact is," replied Vaudoyer, "that if an end was made of Michaud, we should live in peace."

"That is enough prattle," said Tonsard; "we will talk about this seriously later on, by moonlight, out in the open."

Toward the end of October the countess went back to town and left the general at the Aigues. He was not prepared to follow for some time to come, but she was unwilling to lose the opening of the opera season at the Theatre-Italien; and, moreover, she felt lonely and dull now that Émile had left them, for his society had helped her to pass the time while the general went about the country and saw to his affairs.

Winter set in in earnest with November, the weather was gray and gloomy with spells of cold thaw, rain, and snow. Granny Tonsard's trial came on, witnesses must make the journey to Auxerre, and Michaud went to make his deposition. M. Rigou was seized with pity for the old woman, and found her counsel, a barrister who dwelt in his defense on the fact that all the witnesses for the prosecution were interested parties, while there were no witnesses for the defense, but the evidence given by Michaud and the keepers was corroborated by the rural policeman and two of the gendarmes. This de-

cided the day, and Tonsard's mother was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

"Michaud's evidence did it all," the barrister told Tonsard.

IX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

One Saturday evening, Courtecuisse, Bonnébault, Godain, Tonsard, and his wife and daughters, Daddy Fourchon, Vaudoyer, and a few laborers sat at supper at the Grand-I-Vert. Outside there was a dim moon, and a frost of the kind that dries the ground. The first fallen snow had melted and frozen, so that a man walking over the land left no tell-tale footprints to put the pursuit of justice on his track. The hares for the stew off which they were supping had been caught in traps. The whole party were laughing and drinking, for it was the morrow of Catherine Godain's wedding, and they were going to bring the bride home. Godain's new house was not far from Courtecuisse's little farm; for when Rigou sold an acre of land, he took care to sell an isolated plot somewhere on the edge of the woods.

Courtecuisse and Vaudoyer had come with their guns to escort the bride. The whole countryside was sleeping; there was not a light to be seen. Only the wedding party were awake, and their boisterous mirth was at its loudest when Bonnébault's old mother came in. At that hour of night every one looked up in surprise at her, but she spoke in a low voice to Tonsard and her own son.

"It looks as if the wife's time had come," she said. "*He* has just had his horse saddled; he is going to Soulanges for Dr. Gourdon."

"Sit you down, mother," said Tonsard, and, resigning his seat at the table, he laid himself at full length on a bench.

As he did so, they heard a horse pass by at full gallop

along the road. Tonsard, Courtecuisse, and Vaudoyer went at once to the door, and saw Michaud riding through the village.

"How well he understands his business!" said Courtecuisse; "he went round past the front of the castle, he is taking the Blangy road, it is the safest——"

"Yes," said Tonsard, "but he will bring Dr. Gourdon back with him."

"Perhaps he will not find him at home," objected Courtecuisse; "Dr. Gourdon was expected at Conches for the postmistress, who is putting people out at this time of night."

"Why, then he will go by the high road from Soulanges to Conches, that is the shortest way."

"And the surest for us," said Courtecuisse; "there is a bright moonlight just now. There are no keepers along the high road as there are in the woods; you can hear anybody a long way off; and from the lodge gates there, behind the hedges, just where the coppice begins, you can hit a man in the back, as if he were a rabbit, at five hundred paces——"

"It will be half-past eleven before he goes past the place," said Tonsard. "It will take him half an hour to reach Soulanges, and another half-hour to come back. Look here though, boys, suppose that Monsieur Gourdon was on the road——"

"Don't trouble yourself," said Courtecuisse; "I shall be ten minutes' distance away from you on the direct road to Blangy, on the Soulanges side, and Vaudoyer will be ten minutes away on the Conches side. If anybody comes along, a post-chaise, the mail-coach, or the gendarmes, or anything whatever, we will fire into the earth, a smothered shot."

"And if I miss him?"

"He is right," said Courtecuisse. "I am a better shot than you are; Vaudoyer, I will go with you. Bonnébault will take my post; he can call out, a shout is easier to hear, and not so suspicious."

The three men went back into the tavern, and they kept

up the festivity; but at eleven o'clock Vaudoyer, Courtecuisse, Tonsard, and Bonnébault turned out with their guns, none of the women paying any attention to this. Three-quarters of an hour later, moreover, they came in again, and sat drinking until one o'clock in the morning. Catherine and Marie, with their mother and Bonnébault, had plied the rest of the party with drink, until the miller, the laborers, and the two peasants, like Daddy Fourchon, lay snoring on the floor, when the four set out on their errand. When they came back they shook the sleepers, whom they found as they left them, each in his place.

While this orgy went on, Michaud's household endured the most cruel anxiety. Olympe had been taken with false labor-pains, and her husband had started in all haste to summon the doctor. But the poor woman's pains ceased as soon as Michaud was out of the house. Her mind was full of the possible risks which her husband might be running at that late hour in a hostile country full of determined scoundrels; and so strong was her anguish of soul that for the time being it quelled physical suffering. In vain did her servant tell her again and again that her fears were imaginary; she did not seem to understand the words, and sat by the fireside in her room, listening to every sound without. In an agony of terror, which grew from second to second, she called up the man to give him an order which she did not give. The poor little woman walked to and fro in feverish agitation. She went to the windows and looked out, she threw them open in spite of the cold, then she went downstairs, opened the door into the yard, and looked out into the distance and listened.

"Nothing——," she said, "nothing yet," and she went up to her room again in despair.

About a quarter-past twelve she cried out, "Here he is; I hear his horse," and went downstairs, followed by the man, who went to open the great gate.

"It is strange," she said, "he has come back by way of Conches and the forest."

She stood like one horror-struck, motionless and dumb. The man shared her dismay; for, in the frantic gallop of the horse and the clank of the empty stirrups, there had been a mysterious sound which told of something wrong, accompanied by the significant neighing which a horse only gives when alone. Soon, too soon for the unhappy wife, the horse reached the park gate, panting and covered with foam, but the horse was riderless, and the bridle, which doubtless had hindered his flight, was broken. Olympe watched with haggard eyes as the man opened the gate, saw the empty saddle, and without a word turned and fled to the castle like one distraught. She reached the house and fell beneath the general's windows with the cry—

"Monsieur! they have murdered him! they have murdered him!"

Her shriek was so terrible that it woke the count; he rang the bell and roused the household. The moans of Mme. Michaud, who was delivered of a stillborn child as she lay on the earth, brought out the general and the servants. They raised up the unhappy dying woman. "They have killed him!" she said when she saw the general, and died with the words on her lips.

"Joseph!" the count called to his man, "run and fetch the doctor! Perhaps it is not too late. No; you had better go for Monsieur le Curé, she is dead, poor woman, and the child is dead. Great heavens! what a mercy that my wife is not here! Go and see what has happened," he added, turning to the gardener.

"This has happened," said the man from the hunting-lodge, "Monsieur Michaud's horse has come back without him, the bridle is cut, there is blood on his legs. There is a drop of blood on the saddle."

"What can we do to-night?" said the count. "Go and

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MICHAUD'S MURDERER.

call up Groison, find the keepers, saddle the horses, and we will beat up the country!"

In the gray light of the morning, eight men—the count, Groison, the three keepers, and two gendarmes, who had come over from Soulanges with the quartermaster—were out searching the country; but it was mid-day before they found the dead body of the head-forester, in a coppice about five hundred paces from the Conches gate, in the corner of the park between the high road and the road to Ville-aux-Fayes.

Two gendarmes were dispatched—one to Ville-aux-Fayes for the public prosecutor, and the other to the justice of the peace at Soulanges—and meanwhile the general drew up a report with the assistance of the quartermaster. There were marks in the road opposite the park gates where the horse had swerved and reared, and deep dints made by the hoofs of the runaway continued as far as the first footpath into the wood beyond the hedge. The animal had taken the shortest way back to the stable. A bullet was lodged in Michaud's back, and the spine was broken.

Groison and the quartermaster went all over the ground round about the spot where the horse had reared, the "scene of the murder," as it is called in criminal reports, but with all their sagacity they could discover no clue. The ground was frozen so hard that there was not a sign of the footprints of Michaud's murderer, and a spent cartridge was the only thing which they found.

When the public prosecutor arrived with the examining magistrate and Dr. Gourdon, and the body was removed for the post-mortem examination, it was ascertained that the ball, which corresponded with the waste cartridge, was a regulation bullet discharged from a rifle, and that there was not a single rifle in the commune of Blangy. That evening at the castle the examining magistrate and M. Soudry, the public prosecutor, were of the opinion that these facts should be put in the form of a report, and that they had better wait. The

lieutenant from Ville-aux-Fayes and the quartermaster were of the same mind.

"The shot must have been fired by somebody belonging to the neighborhood," said the quartermaster, "but there are two communes in the case, and there are five or six men in Conches and Blangy who are quite capable of the act. Tonsard, whom I should suspect the most, spent the night in drinking. Why, Langlumé the miller, your deputy, general, was of the wedding party; he was there the whole time. They were so drunk that they could not stand upright, and they brought the bride home at half-past one, while it is evident from the return of Michaud's horse that he was murdered between eleven and twelve o'clock. At a quarter-past ten Groison saw the whole party at table, Monsieur Michaud went that way to Soulanges, and he was in Soulanges by eleven o'clock. His horse swerved and pawed the ground on the road by the lodge gates, but Michaud might have received the shot before he reached Blangy, and have held on for some time afterward. Warrants must be issued for twenty persons at the least, and every one under suspicion must be arrested; but these gentlemen know the peasants as well as I do; you may keep them in prison for a year, and you will get nothing out of them but denials. What do you mean to do with the party in Tonsard's place?"

Langlumé, the miller and deputy-mayor, was summoned, and he gave his version of the evening's events. They were all in the tavern, he said, no one left it except to go into the yard for a few minutes. He himself had gone out with Tonsard about eleven o'clock; something was said about the moon and the weather; they had heard nothing. He gave the names of all the party, not one of them had left the place, and toward two o'clock in the morning they had gone home with the newly married couple.

The general and the public prosecutor, taking counsel with the lieutenant and the quartermaster, determined to send to Paris

for a clever detective, who should come to the castle as a workman, and be turned away for bad conduct. He should drink and assiduously frequent the Grand-I-Vert, and hang about the country in discontent with the general. It was the best way of lying in wait to catch a chance indiscretion.

"I will discover poor Michaud's murderer in the end if I should have to spend twenty thousand francs over it!" General Montcornet never wearied of repeating those words.

He went to Paris with this idea in his head, and returned in the month of January, with one of the cleverest detectives on the force, who came ostensibly as foreman of the work at the castle, and took to poaching. Formal complaints were made by the keepers, and the general turned him away. In February the Comte de Montcornet returned to Paris.

X.

THE VICTORY OF THE VANQUISHED.

One evening in May, when summer weather had come, and the Parisians had returned to the Aigues, M. de Troisville, whom his daughter had brought with her, Blondet, the Abbé Brossette, the general, and the sub-prefect from Ville-aux-Fayes, who had come on a visit, were playing at whist and chess. It was half-past eleven o'clock when Joseph came in to tell his master that the bad workman who had been dismissed wished to speak to him; the man said that the general still owed him money. He was very drunk, the valet reported.

"All right, I will go out to him," said the general, and he went out on the lawn at some distance from the house.

"Monsieur le Comte, there is nothing to be made of these people," said the detective. "All that I can find out is simply this—that if you stay here and persist in trying to break the people of the bad habits which they were allowed to contract in La Laguerre's time, the next shot will be fired

at *you*. I can do nothing more here after this; they suspect me even more than your keepers."

The count paid the detective, and the man took his leave; his departure only confirmed previous suspicions of the perpetrators of the crime. When the general went back to join the party in the drawing-room, his face bore traces of such deep and keen emotion that his wife came to him anxiously asking for news.

"Dearest," he said, "I do not want to frighten you, and yet it is right that you should know that Michaud's death was meant for an indirect warning to us to quit——"

"For my own part," said M. de Troisville, "I should not think of going. I had these same difficulties in Normandy under another form; I persisted, and now everything goes well."

"Normandy and Burgundy are two different countries, my lord marquis," said the sub-prefect. "The fruit of the vine is more heating to the blood than the fruit of the apple-tree. We are not so learned here in legal quibbles, and we are surrounded by forests; we have as yet few industries; we are savages, in fact. If I have any advice to give to Monsieur le Comte, it is this—to sell his land and invest the money in the Funds. He would double his income, and he would not have the slightest trouble. If he has a liking for a country life, he can have an estate near Paris, a castle as fine as the Hall of the Aigues, a park inclosed by walls which no one will climb, and farms which he can let to tenants who will come in a cabriolet to pay their rents with bank-notes. He will not need to make out a single summons in twelve months. He can go and come in three or four hours. And, then, Madame la Comtesse, Monsieur Blondet, and my lord marquis would visit you more frequently——"

"Shall *I* fly before the peasants, I, who stood my ground on the Danube?"

"Yes, but where are your Cuirassiers?" asked Blondet.

"Such a fine estate——"

"It will fetch more than two millions of francs to-day."

"The castle alone must have cost as much," said M. de Troisville.

"One of the finest properties for twenty leagues round," said the sub-prefect, "but you will find better near Paris."

"What would two million francs bring in, invested in the Funds?" inquired the countess.

"At the present time, about forty thousand francs," said Blondet.

"The Aigues would not bring you in more than thirty thousand all told," said the countess, "and then of late years you have spent an immense amount upon it, you have had ditches made round the woods."

"You can have a royal palace just now on the outskirts of Paris for four hundred thousand francs. You reap the benefit of other people's follies."

"I thought that you were fond of the Aigues," the count said to his wife.

"But do you not feel that your life is a thousand times more to me than the Aigues?" said she. "And, beside, since the death of poor Olympe and Michaud's murder, the country has grown hateful to me. I seem to see threats and a sinister expression on every face."

The next morning, when the sub-prefect came into M. Gaubertin's drawing-room at Ville-aux-Fayes, the mayor greeted him with—"Well, Monsieur des Lupeaulx, have you come from the Aigues?"

"Yes," said the sub-prefect, with a shade of triumph in his manner. He shot a tender glance at Mlle. Elise as he added, "I am afraid that we are going to lose the general; he is about to sell his estate——"

"Monsieur Gaubertin, I beg of you not to forget my lodge —I cannot bear the noise and dust of Ville-aux-Fayes any longer; like some poor imprisoned bird, I gasp for the air of

the far-off fields and woods," drawled Madame Isaure, her eyes half-closed, her head thrown back over her left shoulder, while she languidly twisted her long pale ringlets.

"Pray be careful, madame!" said Gaubertin, lowering his voice, "your babbling will not buy the lodge for us——"

Then he turned to the sub-prefect—

"So they still cannot find the perpetrators of the crime committed on the person of the head-forester?" he inquired.

"It seems that they cannot," replied the sub-prefect.

"That will injure the sale of the Aigues very much," announced Gaubertin to all who heard him; "for my own part, I would not buy the place, I know. The peasants are too troublesome. Even in Mademoiselle Laguerre's time I used to have trouble with them, though the Lord knows that she allowed them latitude enough."

The month of May was drawing to a close, and there was nothing indicating that the general meant to sell the Aigues. He was hesitating. One night about ten o'clock he was returning from the forest by one of the six avenues which led to the hunting-lodge; he was so near home that he had dismissed the keeper who went with him. At a turn in the avenue a man armed with a rifle came out from a bush.

"General," he said, "this is the third time that I have had you close to the muzzle of my gun, and this makes the third time that I have given you your life."

"And why should you want to kill me, Bonnébault," said the count, without a sign of flinching.

"Faith! if I did not, it would be somebody else; and, you see, I myself have a liking for those who served under the Emperor, and I cannot make up my mind to shoot you like a partridge. Don't ask me about it; I don't mean to say anything. But you have enemies who are more cunning and stronger than you are, and they will crush you at last. I am to have three thousand francs if I kill you, and I shall marry

Marie Tonsard. Well, give me a few acres of waste-land and a cabin; I will go on saying, as I have said before, that I have not found an opportunity. You shall have time to sell your place and go away, but be quick. I am a good fellow still, scapegrace though I am; somebody else might do you a mischief."

"And if I give you your demands," said the general, "will you tell me who it was that promised you the three thousand francs?"

"I do not know; some one is pushing me on to do this, but I am too fond of that person to mention names. And if I did, and if you knew that it was Marie Tonsard, you would be no further. Marie would be as mute as a wall and I should deny my words."

"Come and see me to-morrow," said the general.

"That is enough," said Bonnébault; "if they think that I am bungling the business, I will let you know."

A week after this strange conversation, the district, the whole department—nay, Paris itself—was flooded with huge placards, wherein it was set forth that the Aigues was to be put up for sale in lots; applications to be made to Maître Corbinet, notary, Soulanges. All the lots were knocked down to Rigou, the total amount paid being two million one hundred and fifty thousand francs.

On the morrow of the sale the names of the buyers were changed. M. Gaubertin took the forest, Rigou and Soudry had the vineyards and the rest of the estate. The castle and the park were resold to the Black Band, to be pulled down for building materials; only the hunting-lodge, with its dependencies, was allowed to stand—M. Gaubertin reserved it as a present for his poetical and sentimental spouse.

Many years went by. During the winter of 1837, Émile Blondet, one of the most remarkable political writers of the

time, had reached the lowest depth of poverty, which he had hitherto concealed beneath the brilliant and elegant surface of his life. He was hesitating on the brink of a desperate resolve; he saw that his work, his wit and knowledge of men and affairs, had ended in naught, that he was a machine working for the benefit of others. He saw that all places were filled; he felt that he was growing older, and knew that he had neither wealth nor position. The place-men and incapables of the Restoration had succeeded to the bourgeois imbeciles and incapables, and the Government was reconstituted as it had been before 1830. One evening, when suicide, at which he had scoffed so often, was hovering in his thoughts, he glanced finally over his unlucky life, in which work had filled a far larger space than the dissipation which slander imputed to him, and saw the fair and noble face of a woman rise out of the past, like a stainless and unbroken marble statue amid the dreariest ruins. His porter brought him a letter with a black seal. The Comtesse de Montcornet wrote to inform him of the death of her husband, who had returned to the army, and had again commanded a division. She was his heir; she had no children. That letter, in spite of its womanly dignity, told Blondet that the woman of forty, whom he had loved in his youth, held out a comrade's hand to him and a considerable fortune.

Shorty afterward a marriage took place between the Comtesse de Montcornet and M. Blondet, a newly appointed prefect. He went to his prefecture by the route on which the Aigues formerly lay, and stopped the traveling carriage opposite the place where the park gates used to stand, to see once more the commune of Blangy, so thronged with tender memories for them both. The country was no longer recognizable. The mysterious woods, the avenues in the park, had been cleared away, the country looked like a tailor's book of patterns. The Peasantry had taken possession of the soil as conquerors and by right of conquest; already it had been

divided up into more than a thousand holdings; already the population of Blangy had trebled itself. The once beautiful park—so carefully ordered, so luxuriantly fair—was now an agricultural district, with one familiar building standing out in strong contrast against the changed background. This was the hunting-lodge, re-christened The Lovely Retreat by Mme. Isaure Gaubertin, who had converted it into a villa residence. The building looked almost like a castle, so miserable were the peasants' cabins scattered round about it.

"Behold the march of progress!" cried Émile. "Here is a page from Jean-Jacques' 'Contrat Social.' And here am I, in harness, a part of the social machinery which brings about such results as these! Good heavens! what will become of kings in a little while? Nay, what will become of the nations themselves in fifty years' time, if this state of things continues?"

"You love me—you are at my side. The present is very fair for me, and I hardly care to think of such a far-off future," his wife answered.

"With you beside me, long live the Present! and the devil take the Future!" cried the enraptured Blondet.

He made a sign to the man, the horses sprang forward at a gallop, and the newly wedded lovers resumed the course of their honeymoon.

The author of "The Peasantry" should be allowed to be sufficiently learned in the history of his own times to know that there never were any Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard. He takes the liberty of stating here that he has in his study the uniforms of the Republic, the Empire, and the Restoration; a complete collection of the military costumes of every country which has fought with France as an enemy or as an ally; and more military works on the wars of 1792–1815 than any marshal of France. He takes the opportunity, through the medium of the press, of thanking those persons who have honored him by taking a sufficient interest in his work to correct his mistakes and send him information.

Once for all, he here states in reply that these inaccuracies are deliber-

ately and designedly made. The story is not a "Scène de la Vie Militaire," in which an author is bound not to equip his infantry men with sabretaches. Every attempt to deal with contemporary history, even through contemporary types, has its dangers. It is only by making use of a general scheme, in which all the details are minutely true, and all the facts severally altered by giving an unfamiliar color to them, that the petty reef of "personalities" can be avoided in fiction. In a previous case ("Une Ténébreuse Affaire"), although the facts belonged to history and the details had been altered, the author was compelled to reply to ridiculous objections raised on the ground that there was but *one* senator kidnapped and confined in the time of the Empire. I quite believe it! Possibly he who should have abducted a second senator would have been crowned with flowers.

If this inaccuracy with regard to the Cuirassiers is too shocking, it is easy to suppress the mention of the Guard; though, in that case, the family of the illustrious general who commanded the regiment of horse which was pushed down to the edge of the Danube might ask us to account for those eleven hundred thousand francs, which the Emperor allowed Montcornet to save in Pomerania.

We shall soon be requested to give the name of the geography book in which Ville-aux-Fayes and the Avonne and Soulanges are to be found. Let it be said that all these places, and the Cuirassiers of the Guard likewise, are to be found on those shores where the Master of Ravenswood's tower stands; there you will find Saint Ronan's Well and the lands of Tillietudlem and Gandercleugh and Lilliput and the Abbey of Thelema, and Hoffmann's privy councilors, and Robinson Crusoe's Island, and the estates of the Shandy Family; in that world no taxes are paid, and those who fain would make the voyage may travel thither post, at the rate of twenty centimes a volume.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

PIERRE GRASSOU.

Translated by Clara Bell.

To Lieutenant-Colonel Périollas (of the Artillery) as a proof of the author's affection and esteem.

De Balzac.

On every occasion when you have gone seriously to study the Exhibition of works in sculpture and painting, such as it has been since the Revolution of 1830, have you not been seized by a feeling of discomfort, boredom, and melancholy at the sight of the long, overfilled galleries? Since 1830 the Salon has ceased to exist. Once more the Louvre has been taken by storm by the mob of artists, and they have kept possession. Formerly, when the Salon gave us a choice collection of works of art, it secured the greatest honors for the examples exhibited there. Among the two hundred selected pictures the public chose again; a crown was awarded to the masterpieces by unknown hands. Impassioned discussions arose as to the merits of a painting. The abuse heaped on Delacroix and on Ingres were not of less service to them than the praises and fanaticism of their adherents.

In our day neither the crowd nor the critic can be vehement over the objects in this bazaar. Being compelled to make the selection which was formerly undertaken by the examining jury, their attention is exhausted by the effort; and by the time it is finished the Exhibition closes.

Until 1817 the pictures accepted never extended beyond the two first columns of the long gallery containing the works of the old masters, and this year they filled the whole of this space, to the great surprise of the public. Historical painting, *genre*, easel pictures, landscape, flowers, animals, and water-color painting—each of these eight classes could never yield

more than twenty pictures worthy of the eye of the public, who cannot give attention to a larger collection of pictures.

The more the number of artists increases, the more exacting should the jury of selection become. All was lost as soon as the Salon encroached further on the gallery. The Salon should have been kept within fixed and restricted limits, inflexibly defined, where each class might exhibit its best works. The experience of ten years has proven the excellence of the old rules. Instead of a tourney, you now have a riot; instead of a glorious exhibition, you have a medley bazaar; instead of a selection, you have everything at once. What is the result? A great artist is swamped. The "Turkish Café," the "Turkish Children at the Well," the "Torture by Hooks," and the "Joseph Sold by His Brethren" by Decamps would have done more for his glory if exhibited, all four, in the great room with the hundred other good pictures of the year, than his twenty canvasses buried among three thousand paintings and dispersed among six galleries.

With strange perversity, since the doors have been thrown open to all, there has been much talk of unappreciated genius. When, twelve years before, the "Courtesan," by Ingres, and Sigalon's pictures, Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa," Delacroix's "The Massacre of Scio," and Eugène Deveria's "Baptism of Henri IV."—accepted, as they were, by yet more famous men, who were taxed with jealousy—revealed to the world, notwithstanding the carping of critics, the existence of youthful and ardent painters, not a complaint was ever heard. But now, when the veriest dauber of canvas can display his works, we hear of nothing but misunderstood talent. Where there is no longer any judgment, nothing is judged. Our artists, do what they may, will come back to the ordeal of selection which recommends their work to the admiration of the public for whom they toil. Without the choice exercised by the Academy, there will be no Salon; and without the Salon, art may perish.

Since the catalogue has grown to be a fat volume, many names are found there which remain obscure, notwithstanding the list of ten or twelve pictures that follows them. Among these names, the least known of all, perhaps, is that of an artist named Pierre Grassou, a native of Fougères, and called, for shortness, Fougères in the artist world—a name which now-a-days fills so much space on the page, and which has suggested the bitter reflections introducing this sketch of his life, and applicable to some other members of the artist tribe.

In 1832 Fougères was living in the Rue de Navarin, on the fifth floor of one of those tall, narrow houses that are like the obelisk of Luxor, which have a passage and a dark, narrow staircase with dangerous turnings, which are not wide enough for more than three windows on each floor, and have a court-yard, or, to be exact, a square well, at the back. Above the three or four rooms inhabited by Fougères was his studio, looking out over Montmartre. The studio, painted brick red; the floor, carefully stained brown and polished; each chair provided with a square, bordered mat; the sofa, plain enough, but as clean as that in a tradeswoman's bedroom—everything betrayed the petty existence of a narrow mind and the carefulness of a poor man. There was a closet for keeping the studio properties in, a breakfast table, a sideboard, a desk, and the various objects necessary for painting, all clean and in order. The stove, too, had the benefit of this Dutch neatness, which was all the more conspicuous because the pure and steady northern sky flooded the back room with clear, cold light. Fougères, a mere painter of *genre*, had no need for the huge machinery which ruins historical painters; he had never discerned in himself faculties competent to venture on the higher walks of art, and was still content with small easels.

In the beginning of the month of December of that year, the season when Paris Philistines are periodically attacked by the burlesque idea of perpetuating their faces—in themselves

a sufficient burden—Pierre Grassou, having risen early, was setting his palette, lighting his stove, eating a roll soaked in milk, and waiting to work till his window-panes should have thawed enough to let daylight in. The weather was dry and fine. At this instant, the painter, eating with the patient, resigned look that tells so much, recognized the footfall of a man who had had the influence over his life which people of his class have in the career of most artists—Elias Magus, a picture dealer, a usurer in canvas. And, in fact, Elias Magus came in at the moment when the painter was about to begin work in his elaborately clean studio.

"How is yourself, old rascal?" said the painter.

Fougères had won the cross; Elias bought his pictures for two or three hundred francs, and gave himself the most artistic airs.

"Business is bad," replied Elias. "You all are such lords; you talk of two hundred francs as soon as you have six sous' worth of paint on the canvas. But you are a very good fellow, you are. You are a man of method, and I have come to bring you a good job."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*," said Fougères. "Do you know Latin?"

"No."

"Well, that means that the Greeks did not offer a bit of good business to the Trojans without making something out of it. In those days they used to say, 'Take my horse.' Nowadays we say, 'Take my trash!' Well, what do you want, Ulysses-Lagingeole-Elias-Magus?"

This speech shows the degree of sweetness and wit which Fougères could put into what painters call studio-chaff.

"I don't say that you will not have to paint me two pictures for nothing."

"Oh! oh!"

"I leave it to you; I do not ask for them. You are an honest artist."

"Indeed?"

"Well. I am bringing you a father, a mother, and an only daughter."

"All unique specimens?"

"My word, yes, indeed!—to have their portraits painted. The worthy folk, crazy about art, have never dared venture into a studio. The daughter will have a hundred thousand francs on her marriage. You may do well to paint such people. Family portraits for yourself, who knows?"

The old German image, who passes muster as a man, and is called Elias Magus, broke off to laugh a dry cackle that horrified the painter. He felt as if he had heard Mephistopheles talking of marriage.

"The portraits are to be five hundred francs apiece; you may give me three pictures."

"Right you are!" said Fougères cheerfully.

"And if you marry the daughter, you will not forget me——"

"Marry? I!" cried Pierre Grassou; "I, who am used to have a bed to myself, to get up early, whose life is all laid out——"

"A hundred thousand francs," said Magus, "and a sweet girl, full of golden lights like a Titian!"

"And what position do these people hold?"

"Retired merchants: in love with the arts at the present moment; they have a country house at Ville-d'Avray, and ten or twelve thousand francs a year."

"What was their business?"

"Bottles."

"Don't speak that word; I fancy I hear corks being cut and it sets my teeth on edge."

"Well; am I to bring them?"

"Three portraits; I will send them to the Salon; I might go in for portrait-painting. All right, yes."

And old Elias went downstairs to fetch the Vervelle family.

To understand exactly what the outcome of such a proposal would be on the painter, and the effect produced on him by Monsieur and Madame Vervelle, graced by the addition of their only daughter, it is necessary to glance for a moment at the past life of Pierre Grassou of Fougères. As a pupil, he had learned to draw of Servin, who was regarded in the academical world as a great draughtsman. He afterward worked under Schinner, to discover the secrets of the powerful and splendid coloring that characterizes that master. The master and his disciples had kept the secrets; Pierre had discovered nothing. From thence Fougères had gone to Sommervieux's studio to familiarize himself with that part of art which is called composition; but composition was shy, and held aloof from him. Then he had tried to steal from Granet and Drolling the mystery of their luminous interiors; the two masters had not allowed him to rob them. Finally, Fougères had finished his training under Duval-Lecamus.

Through all these studies and various transformations, Fougères' quiet, steady habits had furnished materials for mockery in every studio where he had worked; but he everywhere disarmed his comrades by his diffidence and his lamb-like patience and meekness. The masters had no sympathy with this worthy lad; masters like brilliant fellows, eccentric spirits, farcical and fiery, or gloomy and deeply meditative, promising future talent. Everything in Fougères proclaimed his mediocrity. His nickname of Fougères—the name of the painter in the play by Fabre d'Eglantine—was the pretext for endless affronts, but by force of circumstances he was saddled with the name of the town "where he first saw the light."

Grassou de Fougères matched his name. Plump and rather short, he had a dull complexion, brown eyes, black hair, a thick prominent nose, a rather wide mouth, and long ears. His placid, gentle, resigned expression did little to improve these features of a face that was full of health but not of movement. He could never suffer from the flow of blood,

the vehemence of thought, or the spirit of comedy by which a great artist is to be known. This youth, born to be a virtuous citizen, had come from his provincial home to serve as store-clerk to a color-man, a native of Mayenne, distantly related to the d'Orgemonts, and he had made himself a painter by the sheer obstinacy which is the backbone of the Breton character. What he had endured, and the way in which he lived during his period of study, God alone knows. He suffered as much as great men suffer when they are haunted by want, and hunted down like wild beasts by the pack of inferior souls, and the whole army of vanity thirsting for revenge.

As soon as he thought himself strong enough for flight on his own wings, he took a studio at the top of the Rue des Martyrs, and there he began to work. He first sent in a picture in 1819. The picture he offered the jury for their exhibition at the Louvre represented a Village Wedding, a laborious imitation of Greuze's picture. It was refused. When Fougères heard the fatal sentence he did not fly into those furies or fits of epileptic vanity to which proud spirits are liable, and which sometimes end in a challenge sent to the president or the secretary, or in threats of assassination. Fougères calmly received his picture back, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and brought it home to his studio, swearing that he would yet become a great painter.

He placed the canvas on the easel and went to call on his old master, a man of immense talent—Schinner—a gentle and patient artist, whose success had been brilliant at the last Salon. He begged him to come and criticize the rejected work. The great painter left everything and went. When poor Fougères had placed him in front of the painting, Schinner at the first glance took Fourgères by the hand—

"You are a capitally good fellow; you have a heart of gold, it will not be fair to deceive you. Listen; you have kept all the promise you showed at the studio. When a man has such

stuff as that at the end of his brush, my good fellow, he had better leave his paints in Brullon's store, and not deprive others of the canvas. Get home early, pull on your cotton night-cap, be in bed by nine; and to-morrow morning at ten o'clock go to some office and ask for work, and have done with art."

"My good friend," said Fourgères, "my picture is condemned already. It is not a verdict that I want, but the reasons for it."

"Well, then, your tone is gray and cold; you see nature through a crepe veil; your drawing is heavy and clumsy; your composition is borrowed from Greuze, who only redeemed his faults by qualities which you have not."

As he pointed out the faults of the picture, Schinner saw in Fougères' face so deep an expression of grief that he took him away to dine, and tried to comfort him.

Next day, by seven in the morning, Fougères, before his easel, was working over the condemned canvas; he warmed up the color, made the corrections suggested by Schinner, and touched up the figures. Then, sick of such patching, he took it to Elias Magus. Elias Magus, being a sort of Dutch-Belgian-Flem, had three reasons for being what he was—miserly and rich. He had lately come from Bordeaux, and was starting in business in Paris as a picture-dealer; he lived on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle. Fougères, who trusted to his palette to take him to the baker's, bravely ate bread and walnuts, or bread and milk, or bread and cherries, or bread and cheese, according to the season. Elias Magus, to whom Pierre offered his first picture, eyed it for a long time, and then gave him fifteen francs.

"Taking fifteen francs a year and spending a thousand, I shall go fast and far," said Fougères, smiling.

Elias Magus gave a shrug and bit his thumb at the thought that he might have had the picture for five francs. Every morning, for some days, Fougères went down the Rue des

Martyrs, lost himself in the crowd on the boulevard opposite Magus' shop, and fixed his eyes on his picture—which did not attract the gaze of the passers-by. Toward the end of the week the picture disappeared. Fougères wandered up the boulevard toward the picture-dealer's store with an affectation of amusing himself. The Jew was standing in the doorway.

"Well, you have sold my picture?"

"There it is," said Magus. "I am having it framed to show to some man who fancies himself knowing in paintings."

Fougères did not dare come along the boulevard any more. He began a new picture; for two months he labored at it, feeding like a mouse and working like a galley-slave. One evening he walked out on the boulevard; his feet carried him involuntarily to Magus' store; he could nowhere see his picture.

"I have sold your picture," said the dealer to the artist.

"For how much?"

"I got my money back with a little interest. Paint me some Flemish interiors, an Anatomy lecture, a landscape; I will take them of you," said Elias.

Fougeres could have hugged Magus in his arms; he looked upon him as a father. He went home with joy in his heart. Then Schinner, the great Schinner, was mistaken! In that vast city of Paris there were some hearts that beat in unison with that of Grassou; his talent was discerned and appreciated!

The poor fellow, at seven-and-twenty, had the artlessness of a boy of sixteen. Any one else, one of your distrustful, suspicious artists, would have noticed Elias' diabolical expression, have seen the quiver of his beard, the ironical curl of his mustache, the action of his shoulders, all betraying the satisfaction of Walter Scott's Jew cheating a Christian. Fougères paraded the boulevards with a joy that gave his face an expression of pride. He looked like a schoolboy protecting a woman. He met Joseph Bridau, one of his fellow-

students, one of those eccentric men of genius who are predestined to glory and disaster. Joseph Bridau, having a few sous in his pocket, as he expressed it, took Fougères to the opera. Fougères did not see the ballet, did not hear the music; he was imagining pictures, he was painting.

He left Joseph half-way through the evening, and ran home to make sketches by lamp-light; he invented thirty pictures, full of reminiscences, and believed himself a genius. Next day he bought some colors and canvasses of various sizes; he spread out some bread and some cheese on his table; he got some water in a jug, and a store of wood for his stove; then, to use the studio phrase, he pegged away at his painting; he employed a few models, and Magus lent him draperies. After two months of seclusion, the Breton had finished four pictures. He again asked Schinner's advice, with the addition of Joseph Bridau's. The two painters found these works to be a servile imitation of Dutch landscapes, of Metzu's interiors, and the fourth was a version of Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lecture."

"Always imitations!" said Schinner. "Ah, Fougères would find it hard to be original."

"You ought to turn your attention to something else than painting," said Bridau.

"To what?" said Fougères.

"Go in for literature."

Fougères bent his head as sheep do before rain. Then he asked and got some practical advice, touched up his paintings, and carried them to Elias. Elias gave him twenty-five francs for each. At this price Fougères made nothing, but, thanks to his abstemiousness, he lost nothing. He took some walks to see what became of his pictures, and had a singular hallucination. His works, so firmly painted, so neat, as hard as tin-plate iron, and as shining as painting on porcelain, seemed to be covered with a fog; they looked quite like old masters.

Elias had just gone out; Fougères could obtain no in-

formation as to this phenomenon. He thought his eyes deceived him.

The painter went home to his studio to make new old masters. After seven years of constant work, Fougères was able to compose and paint fairly good pictures. He did as well as all the other artists of the second class. Elias bought and sold all the poor Breton's pictures, while he laboriously earned a hundred louis a year, and did not spend more than twelve hundred francs.

At the Exhibition of 1829, Léon de Lora, Schinner, and Bridau, who all three filled a large space, and were at the head of the new movement in art, took pity on their old comrade's perseverance and poverty; they managed to get a picture by Fougères accepted and hung in the great room. This work, of thrilling interest, recalling Vigneron in its sentiment and Dubufe's early manner in its execution, represented a young man in prison having the back of his head shaved. On one side stood a priest, on the other a young woman in tears. A lawyer's clerk was reading an official document. On a wretched table stood a meal of which no one had eaten. The light came in through the bars of a high window. It was enough to make the good folk shudder, and they shuddered.

Fougères had borrowed directly from Gerard Dow's masterpiece: he had turned the group of the "Dropsical Woman" toward the window instead of facing the spectator. He had put the condemned prisoner in the place of the dying woman —the same pallor, the same look, the same appeal to heaven. Instead of the Dutch physician, there was the rigid official figure of the clerk dressed in black; but he had added an old woman by the side of Gerard Dow's young girl. The cruelly good-humored face of the executioner crowned the group. This plagiarism, skillfully concealed, was not recognized.

The catalogue contained these words:

510, GRASSOU DE FOURGÈRES (PIERRE), Rue de Navarin, 2.

The Chouan's Toilet; condemned to Death, 1809.

Though quite mediocre, the picture had a prodigious success, for it reminded the spectators of the affair of the robbers —known as the Chauffeurs—of Mortagne. A crowd collected every day in front of the picture, which became the fashion, and Charles X. stopped to look at it. MADAME, having heard of the poor Breton's patient life, grew enthusiastic about him. The Duc d'Orléans asked the price of the painting. The priests told Madame the Dauphiness that the work was full of pious feeling; it had, no doubt, a very satisfactory suggestion of religion. Monseigneur the Dauphin admired the dust on the window-panes, a stupid, dull mistake, for what Fougères had intended was a greenish tone, which spoke of damp at the bottom of the walls. MADAME bought the picture for a thousand francs, and the Dauphin gave a commission for another. Charles X. bestowed the cross on this son of a peasant who had fought for the Royal Cause in 1799; Joseph Bridau, a great painter, was not decorated. The Minister of the Interior ordered two sacred pictures for the church at Fourgères. This Salon was to Pierre Grassou fortune, glory, a future, and life.

To invent in any kind is to die by inches; to copy is to live. Having at last discovered a vein full of gold, Grassou of Fougères practiced that part of this barbarous maxim to which the world owes the atrocious mediocrity whose duty it is to elect its superiors in every class of society, but which naturally elects itself, and wages pitiless war against all real talent. The principle of election universally applied is a bad one; France will get over it. At the same time, Fougères was so gentle and kind that his modesty, his simplicity, and his astonishment silenced recriminations and envy. Then, again, he had on his side all the successful Grassous, representing all the Grassous to come. Some people, touched by the

energy of a man whom nothing had discouraged, spoke of Domenichino, and said, "Hard work in the arts must be rewarded. Grassou has earned his success. He has been pegging at it for ten years, poor old fellow!"

This exclamation, "poor old fellow!" counted for a great deal in the support and congratulations the painter received. Pity elevates as many second-rate talents as envy runs down great artists. The newspapers had not been sparing of criticism, but the Chevalier Fougères took it all as he took his friend's advice, with angelic patience. Rich now, with fifteen thousand francs very hardly earned, he furnished his rooms and his studio in the Rue de Navarin, he painted the picture ordered by Monseigneur the Dauphin and the two sacred works commanded by the Minister, finishing them to the day, with a punctuality perfectly distracting to the cashier of the Ministry, accustomed to quite other ways. But note the good-luck of methodical people! If he had delayed, Grassou, overtaken by the revolution of July, would never have been paid.

By the time he was seven-and-thirty Fougères had manufactured for Elias Magus about two hundred pictures, all perfectly unknown, but by which he had gained with practice that satisfactory handling, that pitch of dexterity at which an artist shrugs his shoulders, and which is dear to the Philistine. Fougères was loved by his friends for his rectitude of mind and steadfastness of feeling, for his perfectly obliging temper and loyal spirit; though they had no respect for his palette, they were attached to the man who held it.

"What a pity that Fougères should indulge in the vice of painting!" his friends would say.

Grassou, however, could give sound advice, like the newspaper writers, who are incapable of producing a book, but who know full well where a book is faulty. But there was a difference between Fougères and these literary critics; he was keenly alive to every beauty, he acknowledged it, and his

advice was stamped with a sense of justice which made his strictures acceptable.

After the revolution of July Fougères sent in ten or more paintings to every exhibition, of which the jury would accept four or five. He lived with the strictest economy, and his whole household consisted of a woman to manage the housework. His amusements lay solely in visits to his friends and in going to see works of art; he treated himself to some little tours in France, and dreamed of seeking inspiration in Switzerland. This wretched artist was a good citizen; he served in the Guard, turned out for inspection, and paid his rent and bills with the vulgarest punctuality. Having lived in hard work and penury, he had never had time to be in love. A bachelor and poor, up to the present day he had had no wish to complicate his simple existence.

Having no idea of any way of increasing his wealth, he took his savings and his earnings every quarter to his notary, Cardot. When the notary had a thousand crowns in hand, he invested them in a first mortgage, with substitution in favor of the wife's rights if the borrower should marry, or in favor of the seller if the borrower should wish to pay it off. The notary drew the interest and added it to the sums deposited by Grassou de Fougères. The painter looked forward to the happy day when his investments should reach the imposing figure of two thousand francs a year, when he would indulge in the dignified leisure of an artist and paint pictures—oh! but such pictures! Real pictures, finished pictures—something like, clipping, stunning! His fondest hope, his dream of joy, the climax of all his hopes—would you like to know it! It was to be elected to the Institute and wear the rosette of the officers of the Legion of Honor! To sit by Schinner and Léon de Lora! To get into the Academy before Bridau! To have a rosette in his button-hole. What a vision! Only your commonplace mind can think of everything.

On hearing several footsteps on the stairs, Fougères pushed his fingers through his top-knot of hair, buttoned his bottle-green vest, and was not a little surprised at the entrance of a face of the kind known in the studio as a *melon*. This fruit was perched on a pumpkin dressed in blue cloth, and graced with a dangling bunch of jingling seals. The melon snorted like a porpoise, the pumpkin walked on turnips incorrectly called legs. A real artist would at once have sketched such a caricature of the bottle-merchant and then have shown him out, saying that he did not paint vegetables. Fougères looked at his customer without laughing, for M. Vervelle wore in his shirt-front a diamond worth a thousand crowns. Fougères glanced at Magus, and said in the studio slang of the day, "A fat job," meaning that the worthy was rich and well able to pay.

M. Vervelle heard it and frowned. He brought in his train some other vegetable combinations in the persons of his wife and daughter. The wife had in her face a fine mahogany tone; she looked like a cocoanut surmounted by a head and tightened in with a belt; she twirled round on her feet; her dress was yellow, with black stripes. She proudly displayed absurd mittens on a pair of hands as swollen as a glover's sign. The feathers of a first-class funeral waved over a coal-scuttle bonnet; lace frills covered a figure as round behind as before, thus the spherical form of the cocoanut was perfect. Her feet, which a painter would have termed hoofs, had a garnish of half-an-inch of fat projecting beyond her patent-leather shoes. How had her feet been gotten into the shoes? Who can tell?

Behind her came a young asparagus shoot, green and yellow as to her dress, with a small head covered with hair in flat braids of a carroty yellow which a Roman would have adored, thread-paper arms, a fairly white but freckled skin, large innocent eyes, with colorless lashes and faintly marked eyebrows, a Leghorn straw hat, trimmed with a couple of honest, white

satin bows, and bound with white satin; virtuously red hands, and feet like her mother's.

These three persons, as they looked round the studio, had a look of beatitude which showed a highly respectable enthusiasm for art.

"And it is you, sir, who are going to take our likenesses?" said the father, assuming a little dashing air.

"Yes, sir," replied Grassou.

"Vervelle, he has the Cross," said the wife to her husband in a whisper while the painter's back was turned.

"Should I have our portraits painted by an artist who was not 'decorated?'" retorted the bottle-merchant.

Elias Magus bowed to the Vervelle family and went away. Grassou followed him on to the landing.

"Who but you would have discovered such a set of phizzes?"

"A hundred thousand francs in settlement!"

"Yes, but what a family!"

"And three hundred thousand francs in expectations, a house in the Rue Boucherat, and a country place at Ville d'Avray."

"Boucherat, bottles, bumpkins, and bounce!" said the painter.

"You will be out of want for the rest of your days," said Elias.

This idea flashed into Pierre Grassou's brain as the morning light had broken on his attic. As he placed the young lady's father in position, he thought him really good-looking, and admired his face with its strong purple tones. The mother and daughter hovered round the painter, wondering at all his preparations; to them he seemed a god. This visible adoration was pleasing to Fougères. The golden calf cast its fantastic reflection on this family.

"You must earn enormous sums; but you spend it as fast as you get it?" said the mother.

"No, madame," replied the painter, "I do not spend. I have not means to amuse myself. My notary invests my money; he knows what I have, and when once the money is in his hands I think no more about it."

"And I have always been told that painters were a thriftless set!" said Father Vervelle.

"Who is your notary, if it is not too great a liberty?" said Madame Vervelle.

"A capital fellow all round—Cardot."

"Lord! lord! Isn't that funny now!" said Vervelle. "Why Cardot is ours, too."

"Do not move," said the painter.

"Sit still, do, Anténor," said his wife; "you will put the gentleman out; if you could see him working you would understand."

"Gracious me, why did you never have me taught art?" said Mademoiselle Vervelle to her parents.

"Virginie!" exclaimed her mother, "there are certain things a young lady cannot learn. When you are married—well and good. Till then be content."

In the course of this first sitting the Vervelle family became almost intimate with the worthy artist. They were to come again two days after. As they left, the father and mother desired Virginie to go first; but, in spite of the distance between them, she heard these words, of which the meaning must have roused her curiosity:

"*Décoré* (decorated)—thirty-seven—an artist who gets commissions and places his money in our notary's hands. We will consult Cardot. Madame de Fougères, eh? not a bad name. He does not look like a bad fellow! A man of business, you would say? But so long as a merchant has not retired from business, you can never tell what your daughter may come to; while an artist who saves—— And then we are fond of art. Well, well——"

While the Vervelles were discussing him, Pierre Grassou was

thinking of the Vervelles. He found it impossible to remain quietly in his studio; he walked up and down the boulevard, looking at every red-haired woman who went by! He argued with himself in the strangest way: Gold was the most splendid of the metals, yellow stood for gold; the ancient Romans liked red-haired women, and he became a Roman, and so forth. After being married two years, what does a man care for his wife's complexion? Beauty fades, but ugliness—remains! Money is half of happiness. That evening, when he went to bed, the painter had already persuaded himself that Virginie Vervelle was charming.

When the trio walked in on the day fixed for the second sitting, the artist received them with an amiable smile. The rogue had shaved, had put on a clean white shirt; he had chosen a becoming pair of trousers, and red slippers with Turkish toes. The family responded with a smile as flattering as the artist's; Virginie turned as red as her hair, dropped her eyes, and turned away her head, looking at the studies. Pierre Grassou thought these little affectations quite bewitching. Virginie was graceful; happily, she was neither like father nor mother. But whom was she like?

"Ah, I see," said he to himself; "the mother has had an eye to business."

During the sitting there was a war of wits between the family and the painter, who was so audacious as to say that Father Vervelle was witty. After this piece of flattery the family took possession of the painter's heart in double-quick time; he gave one of his drawings to Virginie and a sketch to her mother.

"For nothing?" they asked.

Pierre Grassou could not help smiling.

"You must not give your works away like this; they are money," said Vervelle.

At the third sitting old Vervelle spoke of a fine collection of pictures he had in his country house at Ville d'Avray—

Rubens, Gerard Dow, Mieris, Terburg, Rembrandt, a Titian, Paul Potter, etc.

"Monsieur Vervelle has been frightfully extravagant," said Madame Vervelle pompously. "He has a hundred thousand francs' worth of pictures."

"I am fond of the arts," said the bottle-merchant.

When Madame Vervelle's portrait was begun, that of her husband was nearly finished. The enthusiasm of the family now knew no bounds. The notary had praised the artist in the highest terms. Pierre Grassou was in his opinion the best fellow on earth, one of the steadiest of artists, who had indeed saved thirty-six thousand francs; his days of poverty were past, he was making ten thousand francs a year, he was reinvesting his interest, and he was incapable of making a woman unhappy. This last sentence was of great weight in the scale. The friends of the family heard nothing talked of but the celebrated Fougères.

By the time Fougères began the portrait of Virginie he was already the son-in-law-elect of the Vervelle couple. The trio expanded in this studio, which they had begun to regard as a home; there was an inexplicable attraction to them in this cleaned, cared-for, neat, artistic spot. *Abyssus abyssum*, like to like.

Toward the end of the sitting the stairs were shaken, the door was flung open, and in came Joseph Bridau; he rode the whirlwind, his hair was flying; in he came with his broad, deeply-seamed face, shot lightning glances all round the room, and came suddenly up to Grassou, pulling his coat across the gastric region, and trying to button it, but in vain, for the button mould had escaped from its cloth cover.

"Times are bad," he said to Grassou.

"Hah?"

"The duns are at my heels. Halloo! are you painting that sort of thing?"

"Hold your tongue!"

"To be sure——"

The Vervelle family, excessively taken aback by this apparition, turned from the usual red to the cherry scarlet of a fierce fire.

"It pays," said Joseph. "Have you any shot in your locker?"

"Do you want much?"

"A five-hundred-franc note—— There is a party after me of the bloodhound kind, who, when once they have set their teeth, do not let go without having the piece out. What a set!"

"I will give you a line to my notary——"

"What! you have a notary?"

"Yes."

"Then that accounts for your still painting cheeks rose-pink, only fit for a hairdresser's doll!"

Grassou could not help reddening, for Virginie was sitting to him.

"Paint nature as it is," the great painter went on. "Mademoiselle is red-haired. Well, is that a deadly sin? Everything is fine in painting. Squeeze me out some cinnabar, warm up those cheeks, give me those little brown freckles, butter your canvas boldly! Do you want to do better than Nature?"

"Here," said Fougères, "take my place while I write."

Vervelle waddled to the writing-table and spoke in Grassou's ear.

"That interfering muddler will spoil it," said the bottle-merchant.

"If he would paint your Virginie's portrait, it would be worth a thousand of mine," replied Fougères indignantly.

On hearing this, the goodman quietly beat a retreat to join his wife, who sat bewildered at the invasion of this wild beast, and not at all happy at seeing him coöperating in her daughter's portrait.

"There, carry out those hints," said Bridau, returning the palette, and taking the note. "I will not thank you. I can get back to D'Arthez' mansion; I am painting a dining-room for him, and Léon de Lora is doing panels over the doors—masterpieces. Come and see us!"

He went off without bowing even, so sick was he of looking at Virginie.

"Who is that man?" asked Madame Vervelle.

"A great artist," replied Grassou.

There was a moment's silence.

"Are you quite sure," said Virginie, "that he has brought no ill-luck to my portrait? He frightened me."

"He has only improved it," said Grassou.

"If he is a great artist, I prefer a great artist like you," said Madame de Vervelle.

"Oh, mamma, Monsieur Fougères is a much greater artist. He will take me full length," remarked Virginie.

The eccentricities of genius had scared these steady-going Philistines.

The year had now reached that pleasant autumn season prettily called Saint-Martin's summer. It was with the shyness of a neophyte in the presence of a man of genius that Vervelle ventured to invite Grassou to spend the following Sunday at his country-house. He knew how little attraction a bourgeois family could offer to an artist.

"You artists," said he, "must have excitement, fine scenes, and clever company. But I can give you some good wine, and I rely on my pictures to make up for the dullness an artist like you must feel among tradesfolk."

This worship, which greatly soothed his vanity, delighted poor Pierre Grassou, who was little used to such compliments. This worthy artist, this ignominious mediocrity, this heart of gold, this loyal soul, this blundering draughtsman, this best of good fellows, displaying the cross of the royal order of the Legion of Honor, got himself up with care to go and enjoy

the last fine days of the year at Ville d'Avray. The painter arrived unpretentiously by the public conveyance, and could not help admiring the bottle-merchant's handsome residence placed in the midst of a park of about five acres, at the top of the hill, and the best point of view. To marry Virginie meant owning this fine house some day!

He was received by the Vervelles with an enthusiasm, a delight, a genuine heartiness, a simple, commonplace stupidity that overpowered him. It was a day of triumph. The future son-in-law was taken to walk along the nankeen-colored paths, which had been raked, as was due, for a great man. The very trees looked as if they had been brushed and combed, the lawns were mown. The pure country air diluted kitchen odors of the most comforting character. Everything in the house proclaimed, "We have a great artist here!" Little Father Vervelle rolled about his paddock like an apple, the daughter wriggled after him like an eel, and the mother followed with great dignity. For seven hours these three beings never released Grassou.

After a dinner, of which the length matched the splendor, Monsieur and Madame Vervelle came to their grand surprise —the opening of the picture gallery, lighted up by lamps carefully arranged for effect. Three neighbors, all retired business men, an uncle from whom they had expectations, invited in honor of the great artist, an old Aunt Vervelle, and the other guests followed Grassou into the gallery, all curious to hear his opinion of little Daddy Vervelle's famous collection, for he overpowered them by the fabulous value of his pictures. The bottle-merchant seemed to wish to vie with King Louis-Philippe and the galleries of Versailles.

The pictures, splendidly framed, bore tickets, on which might be read in black letters on a gold label:

RUBENS

A Dance of Fauns and Nymphs

REMBRANDT

Interior of a Dissecting-room

Doctor Tromp giving a Lesson to his Pupils

There were a hundred and fifty pictures, all varnished and dusted; a few had green curtains over them, not to be raised in the presence of the "young person."

The artist stood with limp arms and a gaping mouth, without a word on his lips, as he recognized in this gallery half his own works; he, He was Rubens, Paul Potter, Mieris, Metzu, Gerard Dow! He alone was twenty great masters!

"What is the matter? you look pale."

"Daughter, a glass of water!" cried Madame Vervelle.

The painter took the old man by the button of his coat and led him into a corner, under pretense of examining a Murillo. Spanish pictures were then the fashion.

"You bought your pictures of Elias Magus?" said he.

"Yes. All original works."

"Between ourselves, what did he make you pay for those I will point out to you?"

The couple went round the gallery. The guests were amazed at the solemnity with which the artist, following his host, examined all these masterpieces.

"Three thousand francs!" exclaimed Vervelle in an undertone, as he came to the last. "But I tell you forty thousand francs!"

"Forty thousand francs for a Titian!" said the artist aloud; "why, it is dirt-cheap."

"When I told you I had a hundred thousand crowns' worth of pictures——" exclaimed Vervelle.

"I painted every one of those pictures" said Pierre Grassou,

in his ear; "and I did not get more than ten thousand francs for the whole lot."

"Prove it," replied the bottle-merchant, "and I will double my daughter's settlements; for in that case you are Rubens, Rembrandt, Terburg, Titian!"

"And Magus is something like a picture-dealer!" added the painter, who could account for the antique look of the pictures and the practical end of the subjects ordered by the dealer.

Far from falling in his admirer's estimation, M. de Fougères—for so the family insisted on calling Pierre Grassou—rose so high that he painted his family for nothing, and, of course, presented the portraits to his father-in-law, his mother-in-law, and his wife.

Pierre Grassou, who never misses a single exhibition, is now regarded in the Philistine world as a very good portrait-painter. He earns about twelve thousand francs a year, and spoils about five hundred francs' worth of canvas. His wife had six thousand francs a year on her marriage, and they live with her parents. The Vervelles and the Grassous, who get on perfectly well together, keep a carriage, and are the happiest people on earth. Pierre Grassou moves in a commonplace circle, where he is considered one of the greatest artists of the period. Not a family portrait is ordered between the Barrière du Trône and the Rue du Temple that is not the work of this great painter, or that costs less than five hundred francs. The great reason why the townsfolk employ this artist is this: "Say what you like, he invests twenty thousand francs a year through his notary."

As Grassou behaved very well in the riots of the 12th of May, he has been promoted to be an officer of the Legion of Honor. He is major in the National Guard. The Versailles gallery was bound to order a battle-scene of so worthy a citizen, who forthwith walked all about Paris to meet his old

comrades, and to say with an air of indifference, "The King has ordered me to paint a battle!"

Madame de Fougères adores her husband, whom she has presented with two children. The painter, however, a good father and a good husband, cannot altogether get rid of a haunting thought: other painters make fun of him; his name is a term of contempt in every studio; the newspapers never notice his works. Still, he works on and is making his way to the Academy; he will be admitted. And then—a revenge that swells his heart with pride—he buys pictures by famous artists when they are in difficulties, and he is replacing the daubs at the Ville d'Avray by real masterpieces—not of his own painting.

There are mediocrities more vexatious and more spiteful than that of Pierre Grassou, who is in fact anonymously benevolent and perfectly obliging.

PARIS, *December*, 1839.

ABOUT CATHERINE DE' MEDICI
THE EXILES
THE MESSAGE

PREFACE.

THIS book (as to which it is important to remember the *Sur** if injustice is not to be done to the intentions of the author) has plenty of interest of more kinds than one; but it is perhaps more interesting because of the place it holds in Balzac's work than for itself. He had always considerable hankerings after the historical novel: his early and lifelong devotion to Scott would sufficiently account for that. More than one of the *Œuvres de Jeunesse* (youthful works) attempts the form in a more or less conscious way: the "Chouans," the first successful book, definitely attempts it; but by far the most ambitious attempt is to be found in the book before us. It is most probable that it was of this, if of anything of his own, that Balzac was thinking when, in 1846, he wrote disdainfully to Madame Hanska about Dumas, and expressed himself toward "Les Trois Mousquetaires" (which had whiled him through a day of cold and inability to work) nearly as ungratefully as Carlyle did toward Captain Marryat. And though it is, let it be repeated, a mistake, and a rather unfair mistake, to give such a title to the book as might induce readers to regard it as a single and definite novel, of which Catherine is the heroine, though it is made up of three parts written at very different times, it has a unity which the introduction shows to some extent, and which a rejected preface given by M. de Lovenjoul shows still better.

To understand this, we must remember that Balzac, though not exactly an historical scholar, was a considerable student of history; and that, although rather an amateur politician, he was a constant thinker and writer on political subjects. We must add to these remembrances the fact of his intense interest

* About.

in all such matters as Alchemy, the Elixir of Life, and so forth, to which the sixteenth century in general, and Catherine de' Medici in particular, were known to be devoted. All these interests of his met in the present book, the parts of which appeared in inverse order, and the genesis of which is important enough to make it desirable to incorporate some of the usual bibliographical matter in the substance of this preface. The third and shortest, "Les Deux Rêves" (The Two Dreams), a piece partly suggestive of the famous "Prophecy of Cazotte" and other legends of the Revolution (but with more retrospective than prospective view), is dated as early as 1828 (before the turning-point), and was actually published in a periodical in 1830. "La Confidence des Ruggieri," written in 1836 (and, as I have noted in the general introduction, according to its author, in a single night), followed, and "Le Martyr Calviniste," which had several titles, and was advertised as in preparation for a long time, did not come till 1841.

It is unnecessary to say that all are interesting. The personages, both imaginary and historical, appear at times in a manner worthy of Balzac; many separate scenes are excellent; and, to those who care to perceive them, the various occupations of the author appear in the most interesting manner. Politically, his object was, at least by his own account, to defend the maxim that private and public morality are different; that the policy of a state cannot be, and ought not to be, governed by the same considerations of duty to its neighbors as those which ought to govern the conduct of an individual. The very best men—those least liable to the slightest imputation of corrupt morals and motives—have indorsed this principle; though it has been screamed at by a few fanatics, a somewhat larger number of persons who found their account in so doing, and a great multitude of hasty, dense, or foolish folk. But it was something of a mark of that amateurishness which spoilt Balzac's dealing with the subject to choose the

sixteenth century for his text. For every cool-headed student of history and ethics will admit that it was precisely the abuse of this principle at this time, and by persons of whom Catherine de' Medici, if not the most blamable, has had the most blame put on her, that brought the principle itself into discredit. Between the assertion that the strictest morality of the Sermon on the Mount must obtain between nation and nation, between governor and governed, and the maxim that in politics the end of public safety justifies *any* means whatever, there is a perfectly immense gulf fixed.

If, however, we turn from this somewhat academic point, and do not dwell very much on the occult and magical sides of the matter, interesting as they are, we shall be brought at once face to face with the question, Is the handling of this book the right and proper one for an historical novel? Can we in virtue of it rank Balzac (this is the test which he would himself, beyond all question, have accepted) a long way above Dumas and near Scott?

I must say that I can see no possibility of answer except, "Certainly not." For the historical novel depends almost more than any other division of the kind upon interest of story. Interest of story is not, as has been several times pointed out, at any time Balzac's main appeal, and he has succeeded in it here less than in most other places. He has discussed too much; he has brought in too many personages without sufficient interest of plot; but, above all, he exhibits throughout an incapacity to handle his materials in the peculiar way required. How long he was before he grasped "the way to do it," even on his own special lines, is the commonplace and refrain of all writing about him. Now, to this special kind he gave comparatively little attention, and the result is that he mastered it less than any other. In the best stories of Dumas (and the best number some fifteen or twenty at least) the interest of narrative, of adventure, of what will happen to the personages, takes you by the throat at once, and

never lets you go till the end. There is little or nothing of this sort here. The three stories are excellently well-informed studies, very curious and interesting in divers ways. The "Ruggieri" is perhaps something more; but it is, as its author no doubt honestly entitled it, much more an "Étude Philosophique"(Philosophical Study) than an historical novelette. In short, this was not Balzac's way. We need not be sorry—it is very rarely necessary to be that—that he tried it; we may easily forgive him for not recognizing the ease and certainty with which Dumas trod the path. But we should be most of all thankful that he did not himself enter it frequently or ever pursue it far.

The most important part of the bibliography of the book has been given above. The rest is a little complicated, and for its ins and outs reference must be made to the usual authority. It should be enough to say that the "Martyr," under the title of "Les Lecamus," first appeared in the "Siècle" during the spring of 1841. Sovverain published it as a book two years later with the other two, as "Catherine de Medicis Expliquée." The second part, entitled, not "La Confidence," but "Le Secret des Ruggieri," had appeared much earlier in the "Chronique de Paris" during the winter of 1836–37, and had been published as a book in the latter year; it was joined to "Catharine de Medicis Expliquée" as above. The third part, after appearing in the "Monde" as early as May, 1830, also appeared in the "Deux Mondes" for December of the same year, then became one of the "Romans et Contes Philosophiques" (Philosophical Romances and Stories), then an "Étude Philosophique," and in 1843 joined "Catherine de Medicis Expliquée." The whole was inserted in the Comédie in 1846.

"The Exiles" (Les Proscrits) first appeared in the "Revue de Paris" for May, 1831, and was almost immediately included in the "Romans et Contes Philosophiques." Its fortunes will be more fully given in the preface to "Seraphita."

Sensibility claims us in "Le Message," a story which, by the way, was much twisted about in its author's hands, and underwent transformations too long to be summarized here. There is a point of irony in it which commends itself to its author, and which keeps it sweet and prevents it from sharing the mawkishness of the earlier stories. But it is slight.

G. S.

ABOUT CATHERINE DE' MEDICI.

To Monsieur le Marquis de Pastoret,
Member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

When we consider the amazing number of volumes written to ascertain the spot where Hannibal crossed the Alps, without our knowing to this day whether it was, as Whitaker and Rivaz say, by Lyons, Geneva, the Saint-Bernard, and the Valley of Aosta; or, as we are told by Letronne, Follard, Saint-Simon, and Fortia d' Urban, by the Isère, Grenoble, Saint-Bonnet, Mont Genèvre, Fenestrella, and the Pass of Susa; or, according to Larauza, by the Mont Cenis and Susa; or, as Strabo, Polybius, and de Luc tell us, by the Rhône, Vienne, Yenne, and the Mont du Chat; or, as certain clever people opine, by Genoa, la Bochetta, and la Scrivia—the view I hold, and which Napoleon had adopted—to say nothing of the vinegar with which some learned men have dressed the Alpine rocks, can we wonder, Monsieur le Marquis, to find modern history so much neglected that some most important points remain obscure, and that the most odious calumnies still weigh on names which ought to be revered? And it may be noted incidentally that by dint of explanations it has become problematical whether Hannibal ever crossed the Alps at all. Father Ménestrier believes that the Scoras spoken of by Polybius was the Saône; Letronne, Larauza, and Schweighauser believe it to be the Isère; Cochard, a learned man of Lyons, identifies it with the Drôme. But, to any one who has eyes, are there not striking

geographical and linguistic affinities between Scoras and Scrivia, to say nothing of the almost certain fact that the Carthaginian fleet lay at la Spezzia or in the Gulf of Genoa?

I could understand all this patient research if the battle of Cannae could be doubted; but since its consequences are well known, what is the use of blackening so much paper with theories that are but the Arabesque of hypothesis, so to speak; while the most important history of later times, that of the Reformation, is so full of obscurities that the name remains unknown of the man who was making a boat move by steam at Barcelona at the time when Luther and Calvin were inventing the revolt of mind?*

We, I believe, after having made, each in his own way, the same investigations as to the great and noble character of Catherine de' Medici, have come to the same opinion. So I thought that my historical studies on the subject might be suitably dedicated to a writer who has labored so long on the history of the Reformation; and that I should thus do public homage, precious perhaps for its rarity, to the character and fidelity of a man true to the Monarchy.

PARIS, *January*, 1842.

* The inventor of this experiment was probably Salomon of Caux, not of Caus. This great man was always unlucky; after his death even his name was misspelt. Salomon, whose original portrait, at the age of forty-six, was discovered by the author of the "Human Comedy," was born at Caux, in Normandy.

INTRODUCTION.

When men of learning are struck by a historical blunder, and try to correct it, "Paradox!" is generally the cry; but to those who thoroughly examine the history of modern times, it is evident that historians are privileged liars, who lend their pen to popular beliefs, exactly as most of the newspapers of the day express nothing but the opinions of their readers.

Historical independence of thought has been far less conspicuous among lay writers than among the priesthood. The purest light thrown on history has come from the Benedictines, one of the glories of France—so long, that is to say, as the interests of the monastic orders are not in question. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, some great and learned controversialists have arisen who, struck by the need for rectifying certain popular errors to which historians have lent credit, have published some remarkable works. Thus Monsieur Launoy, nicknamed the Evicter of Saints, made ruthless war on certain saints who have sneaked into the Church Calendar. Thus the rivals of the Benedictines, the too little known members of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, began their memoirs, their studious notes, full of patience, erudition, and logic, on certain obscure passages of history. Thus Voltaire, with an unfortunate bias and sadly perverted passions, often brought the light of his intellect to bear on historical prejudices. Diderot, with this end in view, began a book—much too long—on a period of the history of Imperial Rome. But for the French Revolution, criticism, as applied to history, might perhaps have laid up the materials for a good and true history of France, for which evidence has long been amassed by the great French Benedictines. Louis XVI., a man of clear mind, himself translated the English work, which so much agitated the last

century, in which Walpole tried to explain the career of Richard III.

How is it that persons so famous as kings and queens, so important as generals of great armies, become objects of aversion or derision? Half the world hesitates between the song on Marlborough and the history of England, as they do between popular tradition and history as concerning King Charles IX.

At all the periods when great battles are fought between the masses and the authorities, the populace creates an *ogresque* figure—to coin a word for the sake of its exactitude. Thus in our own time, but for the "Memorials of Saint-Helena," and the controversies of Royalists and Bonapartists, there was scarcely a chance but that Napoleon would have been misunderstood. Another Abbé de Pradt or two, a few more newspaper articles, and Napoleon from an Emperor would have become an ogre.

How is error propagated and accredited? The mystery is accomplished under our eyes without our discerning the process. No one suspects how greatly printing has helped to give body both to the envy which attends persons in high places, and to the popular irony which sums up the converse view of every great historical fact. For instance, every bad horse in France that needs flogging is called after the Prince de Polignac; and so who knows what opinion the future may hold as to the Prince de Polignac's *coup d'Etat?* In consequence of a caprice of Shakespeare's—a stroke of revenge, perhaps, like that of Beaumarchais on Bergasse (Begearss)—Falstaff, in England, is a type of the grotesque; his name raises a laugh, he is the King of Buffoons. Now, instead of being enormously fat, ridiculously amorous, vain, old, drunken, and a corrupter of youth, Falstaff was one of the most important figures of his time, a Knight of the Garter, holding high command. At the date of Henry V.'s accession, Falstaff was at most four-and-thirty. This general, who distin-

guished himself at the battle of Agincourt, where he took the Duc d'Alençon prisoner, in 1420 took the town of Montereau, which was stoutly defended. Finally, under Henry VI., he beat ten thousand Frenchmen with fifteen hundred men who were dropping with fatigue and hunger. So much for valor!

If we turn to literature, Rabelais, among the French, a sober man who drank nothing but water, is thought of as a lover of good-cheer and a persistent sot. Hundreds of absurd stories have been coined concerning the author of one of the finest books in French literature: "Pantagruel."

Aretino, Titian's friend, and the Voltaire of his day, is now credited with a reputation, in complete antagonism with his works and character, which he acquired by his over-free wit, characteristic of the writings of an age when gross jests were held in honor, and queens and cardinals indited tales which are now considered licentious. Instances might be infinitely multiplied.

In France, and at the most important period of our history, Catherine de' Medici has suffered more from popular error than any other woman, unless it be Brunehaut or Frédégonde; while Marie de' Medici, whose every action was prejudicial to France, has escaped the disgrace that should cover her name. Marie dissipated the treasure amassed by Henry IV.; she never purged herself of the suspicion that she was cognizant of his murder; Epernon, who had long known Ravaillac, and who did not parry his blow, was *intimate* with the Queen; she compelled her son to banish her from France, where she was fostering the rebellion of her other son, Gaston; and Richelieu's triumph over her on the "Journée des Dupes" was due solely to the cardinal's revealing to Louis XIII. certain documents secreted after the death of Henry IV.

Catherine de' Medici, on the contrary, saved the throne of France, she maintained the Royal authority under circumstances to which more than one great prince would have succumbed. Face to face with such leaders of the factions and

ambitions of the houses of Guise and of Bourbon as the two Cardinals de Lorraine and the two "Balafrés," the two Princes de Condé, Queen Jeanne d'Albret, Henri IV., the Connétable* de Montmorency, Calvin, the Colignys, and Théodore de Bèze, she was forced to put forth the rarest fine qualities, the most essential gifts of statesmanship, under the fire of the Calvinist press. These, at any rate, are indisputable facts. And to the student who digs deep into the history of the sixteenth century in France the figure of Catherine de' Medici stands out as that of a great king.

When once calumnies are undermined by facts laboriously brought to light from under the contradictions of pamphlets and false anecdotes, everything is explained to the glory of this wonderful woman, who had none of the weaknesses of her sex, who lived chaste in the midst of the gallantries of the most licentious Court in Europe, and who, notwithstanding her lack of money, erected noble buildings, as if to make good the losses caused by the destructive Calvinists, who injured art as deeply as they did the body politic.

Hemmed in between a race of princes who proclaimed themselves the heirs of Charlemagne, and a factious younger branch that was eager to bury the Connétable de Bourbon's treason under the throne; obliged, too, to fight down a heresy on the verge of devouring the Monarchy, without friends, and aware of treachery in the chiefs of the Catholic party and of republicanism in the Calvinists, Catherine used the most dangerous but the surest of political weapons—Craft. She determined to deceive by turns the party that was anxious to secure the downfall of the House of Valois, the Bourbons who aimed at the Crown, and the Reformers—the Radicals of that day, who dreamed of an impossible republic, like those of our own day, who, however, have nothing to reform. Indeed, so long as she lived, the Valois sat on the throne. The great de Thou

* Constable; at that time the highest military officer.

understood the worth of this woman when he exclaimed, on hearing of her death—

"It is not a woman, it is Royalty that dies in her!"

Catherine had, in fact, the sense of Royalty in the highest degree, and she defended it with admirable courage and persistency. The reproaches flung at her by Calvinist writers are indeed her glory; she earned them solely by her triumphs. And how was she to triumph but by cunning? Here lies the whole question.

As to violence—that method beats on one of the most hotly disputed points of policy, which, in recent days, has been answered here, on the spot where a big stone from Egypt has been placed to wipe out the memory of regicide, and to stand as an emblem of the materialistic policy which now rules us; it was answered at les Carmes and at the Abbaye; it was answered on the steps of Saint Roch; it was answered in front of the Louvre in 1830, and again by the people against the King, as it has since been answered once more by la Fayette's "best of all republics" against the republican rebellion, at Saint-Merri and the Rue Transnonnain.

Every power, whether legitimate or illegitimate, must defend itself when it is attacked; but, strange to say, while the people are heroic when they triumph over the nobility, the authorities are murderers when they oppose the people! And, finally, if after their appeal to force they succumb, they are regarded as effete idiots. The present Government (1840) will try to save itself, by two laws, from the same evil as attacked Charles X., and which he tried to scotch by two decrees. Is not this a bitter mockery? May those in power meet cunning with cunning? Ought they to kill those who try to kill them?

The massacres of the Revolution are the reply to the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew. The People, being King, did by the nobility and the King as the King and the nobility did by the rebels in the sixteenth century. And popular

writers, who know full well that, under similar conditions, the people would do the same again, are inexcusable when they blame Catherine de' Medici and Charles IX.

"All power is a permanent conspiracy," said Casimir Périer when teaching what power ought to be. We admire the anti-social maxims published by audacious writers; why, then, are social truths received in France with such disfavor when they are boldly stated? This question alone sufficiently accounts for historical mistakes. Apply the solution of this problem to the devastating doctrines which flatter popular passion, and to the conservative doctrines which would repress the ferocious or foolish attempts of the populace, and you will see the reason why certain personages are popular or unpopular. Laubardemont and Laffemas, like some people now living, were devoted to the maintenance of the power they believed in. Soldiers and judges, they obeyed a Royal authority. D'Orthez, in our day, would be discharged from office for misinterpreting orders from the Ministry, but Charles X. left him to govern his province. The power of the masses is accountable to no one; the power of one is obliged to account to its subjects, great and small alike.

Catherine, like Philip II. and the Duke of Alva, like the Guises and Cardinal Granvelle, foresaw the future to which the Reformation was dooming Europe. They saw monarchies, religion, and power all overthrown. Catherine, from the Cabinet of the French kings, forthwith issued sentence of death on that inquiring spirit which threatened modern society —a sentence which Louis XIV. finally carried out. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes was a measure that proved unfortunate, simply in consequence of the irritation Louis XIV. had aroused in Europe. At any other time England, Holland, and the German Empire would not have encouraged on their territory French exiles and French rebels.

Why, in these days, refuse to recognize the greatness which the majestic adversary of that most barren heresy derived

from the struggle itself? Calvinists have written strongly against Charles IX.'s stratagems; but travel through France: as you see the ruins of so many destroyed fine churches, and consider the vast breaches made by religious fanatics in the social body; when you learn the revenges they took, while deploring the mischief of individualism—the plague of France to-day, of which the germ lay in the questions of liberty of conscience which they stirred up—you will ask yourself on which side were the barbarians. There are always, as Catherine says in the third part of this Study, "unluckily, in all ages, hypocritical writers ready to bewail two hundred scoundrels killed in due season." Cæsar, who tried to incite the Senate to pity for Catiline's party, would very likely have conquered Cicero if he had had newspapers and an Opposition at his service.

Another consideration accounts for Catherine's historical and popular disfavor. In France the Opposition has always been Protestant, because its policy has never been anything but negative; it has inherited the theories of the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Protestants on the terrible texts of liberty, tolerance, progress, and philanthropy. The opponents of power spent two centuries in establishing the very doubtful doctrine of freewill. Two more centuries were spent in working out the first corollary of freewill—liberty of conscience. Our age is striving to prove the second—political liberty.

Standing between the fields already traversed and the fields as yet untrodden, Catherine and the church proclaimed the salutary principle of modern communities: One faith, one Lord; but asserting their right of life and death over all innovators. Even if she had been conquered, succeeding times have shown that Catherine was right. The outcome of freewill, religious liberty, and political liberty (note, this does not mean *civil* liberty) is France as we now see it.

And what is France in 1840? A country exclusively ab-

sorbed in material interests, devoid of patriotism, devoid of conscience; where authority is powerless; where electoral rights, the fruit of freewill and political liberty, raise none but mediocrities; where brute force is necessary to oppose the violence of the populace; where discussion, brought to bear on the smallest matter, checks every action of the body politic; and where individualism—the odious result of the indefinite subdivision of property, which destroys family cohesion—will devour everything, even the nation, which sheer selfishness will some day lay open to invasion. Men will say, "Why not the Czar?" as they now say, "Why not the Duc d'Orléans?" We do not care for many things even now; fifty years hence we shall care for nothing.

Therefore, according to Catherine—and according to all who wish to see society soundly organized—man as a social unit, as a subject, has no freewill, has no right to accept the dogma of liberty of conscience, or to have political liberty. Still, as no community can subsist without some guarantee given to the subject against the sovereign, the subject derives from that certain liberties under restrictions. Liberty—no; but liberties—yes; well-defined and circumscribed liberties. This is in the nature of things. For instance, it is beyond human power to fetter freedom of thought; and no sovereign may ever tamper with money.

The great politicians who have failed in this long contest—it has gone on for five centuries—have allowed their subjects wide liberties; but they never recognize their liberty to publish anti-social opinions, nor the unlimited freedom of the subject. To them the words *subject* and *free* are, politically speaking, a contradiction in terms; and, in the same way, the statement that all citizens are equal is pure nonsense and contradicted by nature every hour. To acknowledge the need for religion, the need for authority, and at the same time to leave all men at liberty to deny religion, to attack its services, to oppose the exercise of authority by the public and

published expression of opinion, is an impossibility such as the Catholics of the sixteenth century would have nothing to say to. Alas! the triumph of Calvinism will cost France more yet than it has ever done; for the sects of to-day—religious, political, humanitarian, and leveling—are the train of Calvinism; and, when we see the blunders of those in power, their contempt for intelligence, their devotion to those material interests in which they seek support, and which are the most delusive of all props, unless by the special aid of providence, the genius of destruction must certainly win the day from the genius of conservatism. The attacking forces, who have nothing to lose and everything to win, are thoroughly in agreement; whereas their wealthy opponents refuse to make any sacrifice of money or of self-conceit to secure defenders.

Printing came to the aid of the resistance inaugurated by the Vaudois and the Albigenses. As soon as human thought —no longer condensed, as it had necessarily been in order to preserve the most communicable form—had assumed a multitude of garbs and become the very people, instead of remaining in some sense divinely axiomatic, there were two vast armies to contend with—that of ideas and that of men. Royal power perished in the struggle, and we, in France, at this day are looking on at its last coalition with elements which make it difficult, not to say impossible.

Power is action; the electoral principle is discussion. No political action is possible when discussion is permanently established. So we ought to regard the woman as truly great who foresaw that future, and fought it so bravely. The House of Bourbon was able to succeed to the House of Valois, and owed it to Catherine de' Medici that it found that crown to wear. If the second Balafré had been alive, it is very doubtful that the Béarnais, strong as he was, could have seized the throne, seeing how dearly it was sold by the Duc de Mayenne and the remnant of the Guise faction. The nec-

essary steps taken by Catherine, who had the deaths of François II. and Charles IX. on her soul—both dying opportunely for her safety—are not, it must be noted, what the Calvinist and modern writers blame her for! Though there was no poisoning, as some serious authors have asserted, there were other not less criminal plots. It is beyond question that she hindered Paré from saving one, and murdered the other morally by inches.

But the swift death of François II. and the skillfully contrived end of Charles IX. did no injury to Calvinist interests. The causes of these two events concerned only the uppermost sphere, and were never suspected by writers or by the lower orders at the time; they were guessed only by de Thou, by l'Hôpital, by men of the highest talents, or the chiefs of the two parties who coveted and clung to the Crown, and who thought such means indispensable.

Popular songs, strange to say, fell foul of Catherine's morality. The anecdote is known of a soldier who was roasting a goose in the guardroom of the Château de Tours while Catherine and Henry IV. were holding a conference there, and who sang a ballad in which the Queen was insultingly compared to the largest cannon in the hands of the Calvinists. Henri IV. drew his sword to go out and kill the man; Catherine stopped him, and only shouted out—

"It is Catherine who provides the goose!"

Though the executions at Amboise were attributed to Catherine, and the Calvinists made that able woman responsible for all the inevitable disasters of the struggle, she must be judged by posterity, like Robespierre, at a future date.

And Catherine was cruelly punished for her preference for the Duc d'Anjou, which made her hold her two elder sons so cheap. Henri III. having ceased, like all spoilt children, to care for his mother, rushed voluntarily into such debauchery as made him what the mother had made Charles IX., a childless husband, a king without an heir. Unhappily, Cath-

erine's youngest son, the Duc d'Alençon, died—a natural death. The Queen-mother made every effort to control her son's passions. History preserves the tradition of a supper to nude women given in the banqueting-hall at Chenonceaux on his return from Poland, but it did not cure Henri III. of his bad habits.

This great Queen's last words summed up her policy, which was indeed so governed by good sense that we see the Cabinets of every country putting it into practice in similar circumstances.

"Well cut, my son," said she, when Henri III. came to her, on her death-bed, to announce that the enemy of the throne had been put to death. "Now you must sew up again."

She thus expressed her opinion that the sovereign must make friends with the House of Lorraine, and make it useful, as the only way to hinder the effects of the Guises' hatred, by giving them a hope of circumventing the King. But this indefatigable cunning of the Italian and the woman was incompatible with Henry III.'s life of debauchery. When once the Great Mother was dead, the Mother of Armies (*Mater castrorum*), the policy of the Valois died too.

Before attempting to write this picture of manners in action, the author patiently and minutely studied the principal reigns of French history, the quarrels of the Burgundians and the Armagnacs, and those of the Guises and the Valois, each in the forefront of a century. His purpose was to write a picturesque history of France. Isabella of Bavaria, Catherine and Marie de' Medici, each fills a conspicuous place, dominating from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and leading up to Louis XIV.

Of these three queens, Catherine was the most interesting and the most beautiful. Hers was a manly rule, not disgraced by the terrible amours of Isabella, nor those, even more ter-

rible though less known, of Marie de' Medici. Isabella brought the English into France to oppose her son, was in love with her brother-in-law, the Duc d'Orléans, and with Boisbourdon. Marie de' Medici's account is still heavier. Neither of them had any political genius.

In the course of these studies and comparisons, the author became convinced of Catherine's greatness; by initiating himself into the peculiar difficulties of her position, he discerned how unjust historians, biased by Protestantism, had been to this Queen; and the outcome was the three sketches here presented, in which some erroneous opinions of her, of those who were about her, and of the aspect of the times, are combated.

The work is placed among my Philosophical Studies, because it illustrates the spirit of a period, and plainly shows the influence of opinions.

But, before depicting the political arena in which Catherine comes into collision with the two great obstacles in her career, it is necessary to give a short account of her previous life from the point of view of an impartial critic, so that the reader may form a general idea of this large and royal life up to the time when the first part of this narrative opens.

Never at any period, in any country or in any ruling family, was there more contempt felt for legitimacy than by the famous race of the Medici (in French commonly written and pronounced Medicis). They held the same opinion of monarchy as is now professed in Russia: the ruler on whom the crown devolves is the real and legitimate monarch. Mirabeau was justified in saying, "There has been but one mésalliance in my family—that with the Medici;" for, notwithstanding the exertions of well-paid genealogists, it is certain that the Medici, till the time of Avérardo de' Medici, gonfaloniere of Florence in 1314, were no more than Florentine merchants of great wealth. The first personage of the family who filled a conspicuous place in the history of the great

Tuscan Republic was Salvestro de' Medici, gonfaloniere in 1378. This Salvestro had two sons—Cosmo and Lorenzo de' Medici.

From Cosmo descended Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Duc de Nemours, the Duke of Urbino (Catherine's father), Pope Leo X., Pope Clement VII., and Alessandro, not indeed Duke of Florence, as he is sometimes called, but Duke of the City of Penna, a title created by Pope Clement VII. as a step toward that of Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Lorenzo's descendants were Lorenzino — the Brutus of Florence—who killed Duke Alessandro; Cosmo, the first Grand Duke, and all the rulers of Florence till 1737, when the family became extinct.

But neither of the two branches—that of Cosmo or that of Lorenzo—succeeded in a direct line, till the time when Marie de' Medici's father subjugated Tuscany, and the Grand Dukes inherited in regular succession. Thus Alessandro de' Medici, who assumed the title of Duke of the City of Penna, and whom Lorenzino assassinated, was the son of the Duke of Urbino, Catherine's father, by a Moorish slave. Hence Lorenzino, the legitimate son of Lorenzo, had a double right to kill Alessandro, both as a usurper in the family and as an oppressor of the city. Some historians have indeed supposed that Alessandro was the son of Clement VII. The event that led to the recognition of this bastard as head of the Republic was his marriage with Margaret of Austria, the natural daughter of Charles V.

Francesco de' Medici, the husband of Bianca Capello, recognized as his son a child of low birth bought by that notorious Venetian lady; and, strange to say, Fernando, succeeding Francesco, upheld the hypothetical rights of this boy. Indeed, this youth, known as Don Antonio de' Medici, was recognized by the family during four ducal reigns; he won the affection of all, did them important service, and was universally regretted.

Almost all the early Medici had natural children, whose lot was in every case splendid. The Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, Pope Clement VII., was the illegitimate son of Giuliano I. Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici was also a bastard, and he was within an ace of being Pope and head of the family.

Certain inventors of anecdote have a story that the Duke of Urbino, Catherine's father, told her: "*A figlia d'inganno non manca mai figliuolanza*" (A clever woman can always have children, *à propos* to some natural defect in Henri, the second son of François I., to whom she was betrothed). This Lorenzo de' Medici, Catherine's father, had married, for the second time, in 1518, Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, and died in 1519, a few days after his wife, who died in giving birth to Catherine. Catherine was thus fatherless and motherless as soon as she saw the light. Hence the strange events of her childhood, checkered by the violent struggles of the Florentines, in the attempt to recover their liberty, against the Medici who were determined to govern Florence, but who were so circumspect in their policy that Catherine's father took the title of Duke of Urbino.

At his death, the legitimate head of the House of the Medici was Pope Leo X., who appointed Giuliano's illegitimate son, Giulio de' Medici, then cardinal, Governor of Florence. Leo X. was Catherine's grand-uncle, and this Cardinal Giulio, afterward Clement VII., was her *left-handed* uncle only. This it was which made Brantôme so wittily speak of that Pope as an "uncle in Our Lady."

During the siege by the Medici to regain possession of Florence, the Republican party, not satisfied with having shut up Catherine, then nine years old, in a convent, after stripping her of all her possessions, proposed to expose her to the fire of the artillery, between two battlements—the suggestion of a certain Battista Cei. Bernardo Castiglione went even further in a council held to determine on some conclusion to

the business; he advised that, rather than surrender Catherine to the Pope who demanded it, she should be handed over to the tender mercies of the soldiers. All revolutions of the populace are alike. Catherine's policy, always in favor of Royal authority, may have been fostered by such scenes, which an Italian girl of nine could not fail to understand.

Alessandro's promotion, to which Clement VII., himself a bastard, largely contributed, was no doubt owing partly to the fact of his being illegitimate, and to Charles V.'s affection for his famous natural daughter Margaret. Thus the Pope and the Emperor were moved by similar feelings. At this period Venice was mistress of the commerce of the world; Rome governed its morals; Italy was still supreme, by the poets, the generals, and the statesmen who were her sons. At no other time has any one country had so curious or so various a multitude of men of genius. There were so many that the smallest princelings were superior men. Italy was overflowing with talent, daring, science, poetry, wealth, and gallantry, though rent by constant internal wars, and at all times the arena in which conquerors met to fight for her fairest provinces.

When men are so great they are not afraid to confess their weakness; hence, no doubt, this golden age for bastards. And it is but justice to declare that these illegitimate sons of the Medici were ardent for the glory and the advancement of the family, alike in possessions and in power. And as soon as the Duke of the City of Penna, the Moorish slave's son, was established as Tyrant of Florence, he took up the interest shown by Pope Clement VII. for Lorenzo II.'s daughter, now eleven years of age.

As we study the march of events and of men in that strange sixteenth century, we must never forget that the chief element of political conduct was unremitting craft, destroying in every nature the upright conduct, the *squareness* which imagination looks for in eminent men. In this,

especially, lies Catherine's absolution. This observation, in fact, disposes of all the mean and foolish accusations brought against her by the writers of the reformed faith. It was indeed the golden age of this type of policy, of which Machiavelli and Spinoza formulated the code, and Hobbes and Montesquieu; for the Dialogue of "Sylla and Eucrates" expresses Montesquieu's real mind, which he could not set forth in any other form in consequence of his connection with the Encyclopædists. These principles are to this day the unconfessed morality of every Cabinet where schemes of vast dominion are worked out. In France we were severe on Napoleon when he exerted this Italian genius which was in his blood, and its plots did not always succeed; but Charles V., Catherine, Philip II., Giulio II., would have done just as he did in the affairs of Spain.

At the time when Catherine was born, history, if related from the point of view of honesty, would seem an impossible romance. Charles V., while forced to uphold the Catholic Church against the attacks of Luther, who by threatening the tiara threatened his throne, allowed Rome to be besieged, and kept Pope Clement VII. in prison. This same Pope, who had no more bitter foe than Charles V., cringed to him that he might place Alessandro de' Medici at Florence, and the Emperor gave his daughter in marriage to the bastard Duke. No sooner was he firmly settled there than Alessandro, in concert with the Pope, attempted to injure Charles V. by an alliance, through Catherine de' Medici, with Francis I., and both promised to assist the French King to conquer Italy.

Lorenzino de' Medici became Alessandro's boon companion, and pandered to him to get an opportunity of killing him; and Filippo Strozzi, one of the loftiest spirits of that age, regarded this murder with such high esteem that he vowed that each of his sons should marry one of the assassin's daughters. The sons religiously fulfilled the father's pledge at a time when each of them, under Catherine's protection, could have made

a splendid alliance; for one was Doria's rival, and the other Marshal of France.

Cosmo de' Medici, Alessandro's successor, avenged the death of the tyrant with great cruelty, and persistently for twelve years, during which his hatred never flagged against the people who had, after all, placed him in power. He was eighteen years of age when he succeeded to the government; his first act was to annul the rights of Alessandro's legitimate sons, at the time when he was avenging Alessandro! Charles V. confirmed the dispossession of his grandson, and recognized Cosmo instead of Alessandro's son.

Cosmo, raised to the throne by Cardinal Cibo, at once sent the prelate into exile. Then Cardinal Cibo accused his creature, Cosmo, the first Grand Duke, of having tried to poison Alessandro's son. The Grand Duke, as jealous of his authority as Charles V. was of his, abdicated, like the Emperor, in favor of his son Francesco, after ordering the death of Don Garcias, his other son, in revenge for that of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, whom Garcias had assassinated.

Cosmo I. and his son Francesco, who ought to have been devoted, soul and body, to the Royal House of France, the only power able to lend them support, were the humble servants of Charles V. and Philip II., and consequently the secret, perfidious, and cowardly foes of Catherine de' Medici, one of the glories of their race.

Such are the more important features—contradictory and illogical indeed—the dishonest acts, the dark intrigues of the House of the Medici alone. From this sketch some idea may be formed of the other princes of Italy and Europe. Every envoy from Cosmo I. to the Court of France had secret instructions to poison Strozzi, Queen Catherine's relation, when he should find him there. Charles V. had three ambassadors from Francis I. murdered.

It was early in October, 1533, that the Duke *della città di*

Penna (of the City of Penna) left Florence for Leghorn, accompanied by Catherine de' Medici, sole heiress of Lorenzo II. The Duke and the Princess of Florence, for this was the title borne by the girl, now fourteen years of age, left the city with a large following of servants, officials, and secretaries, preceded by men-at-arms, and escorted by a mounted guard. The young princess as yet knew nothing of her fate, excepting that the Pope and Duke Alessandro were to have an interview at Leghorn; but her uncle, Filippo Strozzi, soon told her of the future that lay before her.

Filippo Strozzi had married Clarissa de' Medici, whole sister to Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, Catherine's father; but this union, arranged quite as much with a view to converting one of the stoutest champions of the popular cause to the support of Medici as to secure the recall of that then exiled family, never shook the tenets of the rough soldier who was persecuted by his party for having consented to it. In spite of some superficial change of conduct, somewhat overruled by this alliance, he remained faithful to the popular side, and declared against the Medici as soon as he perceived their scheme of subjugating Florence. This great man even refused the offer of a principality from Pope Leo X. At that time Filippo Strozzi was a victim to the policy of the Medici, so shifty in its means, so unvarying in its aim.

After sharing the Pope's misfortunes and captivity, when, surprised by Colonna, he took refuge in the castle of Saint-Angelo, he was given up by Clement VII. as a hostage and carried to Naples. As soon as the Pope was free, he fell upon his foes, and Strozzi was then near being killed; he was forced to pay an enormous bribe to get out of the prison, where he was closely guarded. As soon as he was at liberty, with the natural trustfulness of an honest man, he was simple enough to appear before Clement VII., who, perhaps, had flattered himself that he was rid of him. The Pope had so much to be ashamed of that he received Strozzi very ungraciously.

Thus Strozzi had very early begun his apprenticeship to the life of disaster, which is that of a man who is honest in politics, and whose conscience will not lend itself to the caprices of opportunity, whose actions are pleasing only to virtue, which is persecuted by all—by the populace, because it withstands their blind passions; by authority, because it resists its usurpations.

The life of these great citizens is a martyrdom, through which they have nothing to support them but the strong voice of conscience, and the sense of social duty, which in all cases dictates their conduct.

There were many such men in the Republic of Florence, all as great as Strozzi and as masterly as their adversaries on the Medici side, though beaten by Florentine cunning. In the conspiracy of the Pazzi, what can be finer than the attitude of the head of that house? His trade was immense, and he settled all his accounts with Asia, the Levant, and Europe before carrying out that great plot, to the end that his correspondents should not be the losers if he should fail.

And the history of the rise of the Medici family in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is one of the finest that remains unwritten, though men of great genius have attempted it. It is not the history of a republic, or of any particular community or phase of civilization; it is the history of political man, and the eternal history of political developments, that of usurpers and conquerors.

On his return to Florence, Filippo Strozzi restored the ancient form of government, and banished Ippolito de' Medici, another bastard, as well as Alessandro, with whom he was now acting. But he was then afraid of the inconstancy of the populace; and, as he dreaded Pope Clement's vengeance, he went to take charge of a large commercial house he had at Lyons in correspondence with his bankers at Venice and Rome, in France, and in Spain. A strange fact! These men, who bore the burden of public affairs as well as that of

a perennial struggle with the Medici, to say nothing of their squabbles with their own party, could also endure the cares of commerce and speculation, of banking with all its complications, which the vast multiplicity of coinages and frequent forgeries made far more difficult then than now. The word banker is derived from the bench on which they sat, and which served also to ring the gold and silver pieces on. Strozzi found in his adored wife's death a pretext to offer to the Republican party, whose police is always all the more terrible because everybody is a voluntary spy in the name of Liberty, which justifies all things.

Filippo's return to Florence happened just at the time when the city was compelled to bow to Alessandro's yoke; but he had previously been to see Pope Clement, with whom matters were so promising that his feelings toward Strozzi had changed. In the moment of triumph the Medici so badly needed such a man as Strozzi, were it only to lend a grace to Alessandro's assumption of dignity, that Clement persuaded him to sit on the bastard's council, which was about to take oppressive measures, and Filippo had accepted a diploma as senator. But for the last two years and a half—like Seneca and Burrhus with Nero — he had noted the beginnings of tyranny. He had found himself the object of distrust to the populace, and so little in favor with the Medici, whom he opposed, that he foresaw a catastrophe. And as soon as he heard from Alessandro of the negotiations for the marriage of Catherine with a French Prince, which were, perhaps, to be concluded at Leghorn, where the contracting powers had agreed to meet, he resolved to go to France and follow the fortunes of his niece, who would need a guardian. Alessandro, delighted to be quit of a man so difficult to manage in what concerned Florence, applauded this decision, which spared him a murder, and advised Strozzi to place himself at the head of Catherine's household.

In point of fact, to dazzle the French Court, the Medici

had constituted a brilliant suite for the young girl whom they quite incorrectly styled the Princess of Florence, and who was also called the Duchess of Urbino. The procession, at the head of it Duke Alessandro, Catherine, and Strozzi, consisted of more than a thousand persons, exclusive of the escort and serving-men; and when the last of them were still at the gate of Florence, the foremost had already got beyond the first village outside the town—where straw plait for hats is now made.

It was beginning to be generally known that Catherine was to marry a son of Francis the First, but as yet it was no more than a rumor which found confirmation in the country from this triumphant progress from Florence to Leghorn. From the preparations required, Catherine suspected that her marriage was in question, and her uncle revealed to her the abortive scheme of her ambitious family, who had aspired to the hand of the Dauphin. Duke Alessandro still hoped that the Duke of Albany might succeed in changing the determination of the French King, who, though anxious to secure the aid of the Medici in Italy, would only give them the Duc d'Orléans. This narrowness lost Italy to France, and did not hinder Catherine from being Queen.

This Duke of Albany, the son of Alexander Stewart, brother of James III.* of Scotland, had married Anne de la Tour de Boulogne, sister to Madeleine, Catherine's mother; he was thus her maternal uncle. It was through her mother that Catherine was so rich and connected with so many families; for, strangely enough, Diane de Poitiers, her rival, was also her cousin. Jean de Poitiers, Diane's father, was the son of Jeanne de la Tour de Boulogne, the Duchess of Urbino's aunt. Catherine was also related to Mary Stewart, her daughter-in-law.

Catherine was now informed that her dower in money would amount to a hundred thousand ducats. The ducat was

* Great-uncle to Mary, Queen of Scots.

a gold-piece as large as one of our old louis d'or, but only half as thick. Thus a hundred thousand ducats in those days represented, in consequence of the high value of gold, six millions of francs at the present time, the ducat being worth about twelve francs. The importance of the banking-house of Strozzi, at Lyons, may be imagined from this, as it was his factor there who paid over the twelve hundred thousand livres in gold. The counties of Auvergne and Lauraguais also formed part of Catherine's portion, and the Pope, Clement VII., made her a gift of a hundred thousand ducats more in jewels, precious stones, and other wedding gifts, to which Duke Alessandro contributed.

On reaching Leghorn, Catherine, still so young, must have been flattered by the extraordinary magnificence displayed by Pope Clement VII., her "uncle in Our Lady," then the head of the House of Medici, to crush the Court of France. He had arrived at the port in one of his galleys hung with crimson satin trimmed with gold fringe, and covered with an awning of cloth of gold. This barge, of which the decorations had cost nearly twenty thousand ducats, contained several rooms for the use of Henri de France's future bride, furnished with the choicest curiosities the Medici had been able to collect. The oarsmen, magnificently dressed, and the seamen were under the captaincy of a prior of the order of the Knights of Rhodes. The Pope's household filled three more barges.

The Duke of Albany's galleys, moored by the side of the Pope's, formed, with these, a considerable flotilla.

Duke Alessandro presented the officers of Catherine's household to the Pope, with whom he held a secret conference, introducing to him, as seems probable, Count Sebastian Montecuculi, who had just left the Emperor's service—rather suddenly, it was said—and the two generals, Antonio de Leyva and Fernando Gonzaga. Was there a premeditated plan between these two bastards to make the Duc d'Orléans the Dauphin? What was the reward promised to Count Se-

bastian Montecuculi, who, before entering the service of Charles V., had studied medicine? History is silent on these points. We shall see, indeed, in what obscurity the subject is wrapped. It is so great that some serious and conscientious historians have recently recognized Montecuculi's innocence.

Catherine was now officially informed by the Pope himself of the alliance proposed for her. The Duke of Albany had had great difficulty in keeping the King of France to his promise of giving even his second son to Catherine de' Medici; and Clement's impatience was so great, he was so much afraid of seeing his schemes upset either by some intrigue on the part of the Emperor or by the haughtiness of France, where the great nobles cast an evil eye on this union, that he embarked forthwith and made for Marseilles. He arrived there at the end of October, 1533.

In spite of this splendor, the House of the Medici was eclipsed by the sovereign of France. To show to what a pitch these great bankers carried their magnificence, the dozen pieces given by the Pope in the bride's wedding purse consisted of gold medals of inestimable historical interest, for they were at that time unique. But Francis I., who loved festivity and display, distinguished himself on this occasion. The wedding feasts for Henri de Valois and Catherine went on for thirty-four days. It is useless to repeat here details which may be read in every history of Provence and Marseilles as to this famous meeting between the Pope and the King of France, which was the occasion of a jest of the Duke of Albany's as to the duty of fasting; a retort recorded by Brantôme which vastly amused the Court, and shows the tone of manners at that time.

Though Henri de Valois was but three weeks older than Catherine, the Pope insisted on the immediate consummation of the marriage between these two children, so greatly did he dread the subterfuges of diplomacy and the trickery commonly practiced at that period. Clement, indeed, very anxious for

proof, remained thirty-four days at Marseilles, in the hope, it is said, of some visible evidence in his young relation, who at fourteen was marriageable. And it was, no doubt, when questioning Catherine before his departure, that he tried to console her by the famous speech ascribed to Catherine's father: *"A figlia d'inganno non manca mai la figliuolanza."* *

The strangest conjectures have been given to the world as to the causes of Catherine's barrenness during ten years. Few persons nowadays are aware that various medical works contain suppositions as to this matter, so grossly indecent that they could not be repeated.† This gives some clue to the strange calumnies which still blacken this Queen, whose every action was distorted to her injury. The reason lay simply with her husband. It is sufficient evidence that, at a time when no prince was shy of having natural children, Diane de Poitiers, far more highly favored than his wife, had no children; and nothing is commoner in surgical experience than such a malformation as this Prince's, which gave rise to a jest of the ladies of the Court, who would have made him abbé of Saint-Victor, at a time when the French language was as free as the Latin tongue. After the Prince was operated on, Catherine had ten children.

The delay was a happy thing for France. If Henri II. had had children by Diane de Poitiers, it would have caused serious political complications. At the time of his treatment, the Duchesse de Valentinois was in the second youth of womanhood. These facts alone show that the history of Catherine de' Medici remains to be entirely re-written; and that, as Napoleon very shrewdly remarked, the history of France should be in one volume only, or in a thousand.

When we compare the conduct of Charles V. with that of the King of France during the Pope's stay at Marseilles, it is greatly to the advantage of Francis—as indeed in every in-

* See page 16.

† See *Bayle*, Art. *Fernel*.

stance. Here is a brief report of this meeting as given by a contemporary:

"His Holiness the Pope, having been conducted to the Palace prepared for him, as I have said, outside the port, each one withdrew to his chamber until the morrow, when his said Holiness prepared to make his entry. Which was done with great sumptuousness and magnificence, he being set on a throne borne on the shoulders of two men in his pontifical habit, saving only the tiara, while before him went a white palfrey bearing the Holy Sacrament, the said palfrey being led by two men on foot in very fine raiment holding a bridle of white silk. After him came all the cardinals in their habit, riding their pontifical asses, and Madame the Duchess of Urbino in great magnificence, with a goodly company of ladies and gentlemen alike of France and of Italy. And the Pope, with all this company, being come to the place prepared where they should lodge, each one withdrew; and all this was ordered and done without any disorder or tumult. Now, while as the Pope was making his entry, the King crossed the water in his frigate and went to lodge there whence the Pope had come, to the end that on the morrow he might come from thence to pay homage to the Holy Father, as beseemed a most Christian King.

"The King, being then ready, set forth to go to the Palace where the Pope was, accompanied by the Princes of his blood, Monsieur the Duc de Vendosmois (father of the Vidame de Chartres), the Comte de Saint-Pol, Monsieur de Montmorency, and Monsieur de la Roche-sur-Yon, the Duc de Nemours (brother to the Duke of Savoy who died at that place), the Duke of Albany, and many others, counts, barons, and nobles, the Duc de Montmorency being at all times about the King's person. The King, being come to the Palace, was received by the Pope and all the College of Cardinals assembled in consistory, with much civility (*fort humainement*). This done, each one went to the place appointed to him, and

the King took with him many cardinals to feast them, and among them Cardinal de' Medici, the Pope's nephew, a very magnificent lord with a fine escort. On the morrow, those deputed by his Holiness and by the King began to treat of those matters whereon they had met to agree. First of all, they treated of the question of faith, and a bull was read for the repression of heresy, and to hinder things from coming to a greater combustion (*une plus grande combustion*) than they are in already. Then was performed the marriage ceremony between the Duc d'Orléans, the King's second son, and Catherine de' Medici, Duchess of Urbino, his Holiness' niece, under conditions the same, or nearly the same, as had been formerly proposed to the Duke of Albany. The said marriage was concluded with great magnificence, and our Holy Father married them.* This marriage being thus concluded, the Holy Father held a consistory, wherein he created four cardinals to wait on the King, to wit: Cardinal le Veneur, heretofore Bishop of Lisieux and High Almoner; Cardinal de Boulogne, of the family of la Chambre, half-brother on his mother's side to the Duke of Albany; Cardinal de Châtillon, of the family of Coligny, nephew to the Sire de Montmorency; and Cardinal de Givry."

When Strozzi paid down the marriage portion in the presence of the Court, he observed some surprise on the part of the French nobles; they said pretty loudly that it was a small price for such a mésalliance—what would they say to-day? Cardinal Ippolito replied—

"Then you are not informed as to your King's secrets. His holiness consents to bestow on France three pearls of inestimable price—Genoa, Milan, and Naples."

The Pope left Count Sebastian Montecuculi to present himself at the French Court, where he made an offer of his

* At that time in French, as in Italian, the words *marry* and *espouse* were used in a contrary sense to their present meaning. *Marier* was the fact of being married, *épouser* was the priestly function.

services, complaining of Antonio de Leyva and Fernando Gonzaga, for which reason he was accepted. Montecuculi was not one of Catherine's household, which was composed entirely of French ladies and gentlemen; for, by a law of the realm which the Pope was rejoiced to see carried out, Catherine was naturalized by letters patent before her marriage. Montecuculi was at first attached to the household of the Queen, Charles V.'s sister. Then, not long after, he entered the Dauphin's service in the capacity of cupbearer.

The Duchesse d'Orléans found herself entirely swamped at the Court of Francis I. Her young husband was in love with Diane de Poitiers, who was certainly her equal in point of birth, and a far greater lady. The daughter of the Medici took rank below Queen Eleanor, Charles V.'s sister, and the Duchesse d'Etampes, whose marriage to the head of the family of de Brosse had given her one of the most powerful positions and highest titles in France. Her aunt, the Duchess of Albany, the Queen of Navarre, the Duchesse de Guise, the Duchesse de Vendôme, the wife of the Connétable, and many other women, by their birth and privileges as well as by their influence in the most sumptuous Court ever held by a French King—not excepting Louis XIV.—wholly eclipsed the daughter of the Florentine merchants, who was indeed more illustrious and richer through the Tour de Boulogne family than through her descent from the Medici.

Filippo Strozzi, a republican at heart, regarded his niece's position as so critical and difficult that he felt himself incapable of directing her in the midst of conflicting interests, and deserted her at the end of a year, being indeed recalled to Italy by the death of Clement VII. Catherine's conduct, when we remember that she was but just fifteen, was a marvel of prudence. She very adroitly attached herself to the King, her father-in-law, leaving him as rarely as possible; she was with him on horseback, in hunting, and in war.

Her adoration of Francis I. saved the house of Medici from all suspicion when the Dauphin died poisoned. At that time Catherine and the Duc d'Orléans were at the King's head-quarters in Provence, for France had already been invaded by Charles V., the King's brother-in-law. The whole Court had remained on the scene of the wedding festivities, now the theatre of the most barbarous war. Just as Charles V., compelled to retreat, had fled, leaving the bones of his army in Provence, the Dauphin was returning to Lyons by the Rhone. Stopping at Tournon for the night, to amuse himself, he went through some athletic exercises, such as formed almost the sole education he or his brother received, in consequence of their long detention as hostages. The Prince being very hot—it was in the month of August—was so rash as to ask for a glass of water, which was given to him, iced, by Montecuculi. The Dauphin died almost instantaneously.

The King idolized his son. The Dauphin was indeed, as historians are agreed, a very accomplished Prince. His father, in despair, gave the utmost publicity to the proceedings against Montecuculi, and placed the matter in the hands of the most learned judges of the day.

After heroically enduring the first tests of torture without confessing anything, the Count made an avowal by which he fully implicated the Emperor and his two generals, Antonio de Leyva and Fernando Gonzago. This, however, did not satisfy Francis I. Never was a case more solemnly thrashed out than this. An eye-witness gives the following account of what the King did:

"The King called all the Princes of the Blood, and all the Knights of his Order, and many other high personages of the realm, to meet at Lyons; the Pope's Legate and Nuncio, the cardinals who were of his Court, and the ambassadors of England, Scotland, Portugal, Venice, Ferrara, and others; together with all the princes and great nobles of foreign countries, both of Italy and of Germany, who were at that

time residing at his Court, to wit: The Duke of Wittemberg, in Allemaigne; the Dukes of Somma, of Arianna, and of Atria; the Princes of Melphe [Malfi?] (who had desired to marry Catherine), and of Stilliano, Neapolitan; the Marquis di Vigevo, of the House of Trivulzio, Milanese; the Signor Giovanni Paolo di Ceri, Roman; the Signor Césare Fregose, Genoese; the Signor Annibale Gonzaga, Mantuan, and many more. Who being assembled, he caused to be read in their presence, from the beginning to the end, the trial of that wretched man who had poisoned his late Highness the Dauphin, with all the interrogations, confessions, confrontings, and other proceedings usual in criminal trials, not choosing that the sentence should be carried out until all those present had given their opinion on this monstrous and miserable matter."

Count Montecuculi's fidelity and devotion may seem extraordinary in our day of universal indiscretion, when everybody, and even ministers, talk over the most trivial incidents in which they have put a finger; but in those times princes could command devoted servants, or knew how to choose them. There were monarchical Moreys then, because there was faith. Never look for great things from self-interest: interests may change; but look for anything from feeling, from religious faith, monarchical faith, patriotic faith. These three beliefs alone can produce a Berthereau of Geneva, a Sydney or a Strafford in England, assassins to murder Thomas à Becket, or a Montecuculi; Jacques Cœur and Jeanne d'Arc, or Richelieu and Danton; a Bonchamp, a Talmont, a Clément, or a Chabot.

Charles V. made use of the highest personages to carry out the murder of three ambassadors from Francis I. A year later Lorenzino, Catherine's cousin, assassinated Duke Alessandro after three years of dissimulation and in circumstances which gained him the surname of the Florentine Brutus. The rank of the victim was so little a check on such undertakings

that neither Leo X. nor Clement VII. seems to have died a natural death. Mariana, the historian of Philip II., almost jests in speaking of the death of the Queen of Spain, a Princess of France, saying that "for the greater glory of the Spanish throne God suffered the blindness of the doctors who treated the Queen for dropsy." When King Henri II. allowed himself to utter a scandal which deserved a sword-thrust, he could find la Châtaignerie willing to take it. At that time royal personages had their meals served to them in padlocked boxes of which they had the key. Hence the *droit de cadenas*, the *right of the padlock*, an honor which ceased to exist in the reign of Louis XIV.

The Dauphin died of poison, the same perhaps as caused the death of MADAME, under Louis XIV. Pope Clement had been dead two years; Duke Alessandro, steeped in debauchery, seemed to have no interest in the Duc d'Orléans' elevation. Catherine, now seventeen years old, was with her father-in-law, whom she devotedly admired; Charles V. alone seemed to have an interest in the Dauphin's death, because Francis I. intended his son to form an alliance which would have extended the power of France. Thus the Count's confession was very ingeniously based on the passions and policy of the day. Charles V. had fled after seeing his troops overwhelmed in Provence, and with them his good fortune, his reputation, and his hopes of aggrandizement. And note that, even if an innocent man had confessed under torture, the King afterward gave him freedom of speech before an august assembly, and in the presence of men with whom innocence had a fair chance of a hearing. The King wanted the truth, and sought it in good faith.

In spite of her now brilliant prospects, Catherine's position at Court was unchanged by the Dauphin's death; her childlessness made a divorce seem probable when her husband should become king. The Dauphin was now enslaved by Diane de Poitiers, who dared to be the rival of Madame

d'Etampes. Catherine was therefore doubly attentive and insinuating to her father-in-law, understanding that he was her sole mainstay.

Thus the first ten years of Catherine's married life were spent in the unceasing regrets caused by repeated disappointments when she hoped to have a child, and the vexations of her rivalry with Diane. Imagine what the life must be of a princess constantly spied on by a jealous mistress who was favored by the Catholic party, and by the strong support the Sénéchale had acquired through the marriage of her daughters —one to Robert de la Mark, Duc de Bouillon, Prince de Sédan; the other to Claude de Lorraine, Duc d'Aumale.

Swamped between the party of the Duchesse d'Etampes and that of the Sénéchale (the title born by Diane de Poitiers during the reign of Francis I.), who divided the Court and political feeling between the two mortal foes, Catherine tried to be the friend of both the Duchess and Diane de Poitiers. She, who was to become so great a queen, played the part of a subaltern. Thus she served her apprenticeship to the double-faced policy which afterward was the secret clue to her life. At a later date the Queen found herself between the Catholics and the Calvinists, as the woman had been, for ten years, between Madame d'Etampes and Madame de Poitiers.

She studied the contradictions of French policy. Francis upheld Calvin and the Lutherans to annoy Charles V. Then, after having covertly and patiently fostered the Reformation in Germany, after tolerating Calvin's presence at the Court of Navarre, he turned against it with undisguised severity. So Catherine could see the Court and the women of the Court playing with the fire of heresy; Diane at the head of the Catholic party with the Guises, only because the Duchesse d'Etampes was on the side of Calvin and the Protestants.

This was Catherine's political education; and in the King's private circle she could study the mistakes made by the Medici. The Dauphin was antagonistic to his father on

every point; he was a bad son. He forgot the hardest but the truest axiom of Royalty, namely, that the throne is a responsible entity, and that a son who may oppose his father during his lifetime must carry out his policy on succeeding to the throne. Spinoza, who was as deep a politician as he was a great philosopher, says, in treating of the case of a king who has succeeded to another by a revolution or by treason: "If the new King hopes to secure his throne and protect his life, he must display so much zeal in avenging his predecessor's death that no one shall feel tempted to repeat such a crime. But to avenge him worthily it is not enough that he should shed the blood of his subjects; he must confirm the maxims of him whose place he fills, and walk in the same ways of government."

It was the application of this principle which gave the Medici to Florence. Cosmo I., Alessandro's successor, eleven years later, instigated the murder, at Venice, of the Florentine Brutus, and, as has been said, persecuted the Strozzi without mercy. It was the neglect of this principle that overthrew Louis XVI. That King was false to every principle of government when he reinstated the Parlements suppressed by his grandfather. Louis XV. had been clear-sighted; the Parlements, and especially that of Paris, were quite half to blame for the disorders that necessitated the assembling of the States-General. Louis XV.'s mistake was that when he threw down that barrier between the throne and the people, he did not erect a stronger one, that he did not substitute for the Parlements a strong constitutional rule in the provinces. There lay the remedy for the evils of the Monarchy, the voting power for taxation and the incidence of the taxes, with consent gradually won to the reforms needed in the monarchical rule.

Henri II.'s first act was to give all his confidence to the Connétable de Montmorency, whom his father had desired

him to leave in banishment. The Connétable de Montmorency, with Diane de Poitiers, to whom he was closely attached, was master of the kingdom. Hence Catherine was even less powerful and happy as Queen of France than she had been as the Dauphiness.

At first, from the year 1543, she had a child every year for ten years, and was fully taken up by her maternal functions during that time, which included the last years of Francis I.'s reign, and almost the whole of her husband's. It is impossible not to detect in this constant child-bearing the malicious influence of a rival who thus kept the legitimate wife out of the way. This feminine and barbarous policy was no doubt one of Catherine's grievances against Diane. Being thus kept out of the tide of affairs, this clever woman spent her time in observing all the interests of the persons at Court, and all the parties formed there. The Italians who had followed her excited violent suspicions. After the execution of Montecuculi, the Connétable de Montmorency, Diane, and most of the crafty politicians at Court were racked with doubts of the Medici; but Francis I. always scouted them. Still the Gondi, the Biraguas, the Strozzi, the Ruggieri, the Sardini, in short, all who were classed as the Italians who had arrived in Catherine's wake, were compelled to exercise every faculty of wit, policy, and courage to enable them to remain at Court under the burden of disfavor that weighed on them. During the supremacy of Diane de Poitiers, Catherine's obligingness went so far that some clever folk have seen in it an evidence of the profound dissimulation to which she was compelled by men and circumstances and by the conduct of Henri II. But it is going too far to say that she never asserted her rights as a wife and a queen. Her ten children (beside one miscarriage) were a sufficient explanation of the King's conduct, who was thus set free to spend his time with Diane de Poitiers. But the King certainly never fell short of what he owed to himself; he gave the Queen an entry worthy of any that had pre-

viously taken place, on the occasion of her coronation. The records of the Parlement and of the Exchequer prove that these two important bodies went to meet Catherine outside Paris, as far as Saint-Lazare. Here, indeed, is a passage from du Tillet's narrative:

"A scaffolding had been erected at Saint-Lazare, whereon was a throne (which du Tillet calls a chair of state, *chaire de parement*). Catherine seated herself on this, dressed in a surcoat, or sort of cape of ermine, covered with jewels; beneath it a bodice, with a court train, and on her head a crown of pearls and diamonds; she was supported by the Maréchale de la Mark, her lady of honor. Around her, standing, were the princes of the Blood and other princes and noblemen richly dressed, with the Chancellor of France in a robe of cloth of gold in a pattern on a ground of red cramoisy.* In front of the Queen and on the same scaffolding were seated, in two rows, twelve duchesses and countesses, dressed in surcoats of ermine, stomachers, trains, and fillets, that is to say, coronets, whether duchesses or countesses. There were the Duchesses d'Estouteville, de Montpensier—the elder and the younger—the Princesse de la Roche-sur-Yon; the Duchesses de Guise, de Nivernois, d'Aumale, de Valentinois (Diane de Poitiers); Mademoiselle the legitimized bastard 'of France' (a title given to the King's daughter Diane, who became Duchesse de Castro-Farnese, and afterward Duchesse de Montmorency-Damville), Madame la Connétable, and Mademoiselle de Nemours, not to mention the other ladies who could find no room. The four *capped* Presidents (*à mortier*), with some other members of the Court and the chief clerk, du Tillet, went up on to the platform and did their service, and the First President Lizet, kneeling on one knee, addressed the Queen. The Chancellor, likewise on one knee, made response. She made her entrance into Paris at about three in

* The old French word *cramoisi* did not mean merely a crimson red, but denoted a special excellence of the dye. (See Rabelais.)

the afternoon, riding in an open litter, Madame Marguerite de France sitting opposite to her, and by the side of the litter came the Cardinals d'Amboise, de Châtillon, de Boulogne, and de Lenoncourt, in their rochets. She got out at the Church of Notre-Dame, and was received by the clergy. After she had made her prayer, she was carried along the Rue de la Calandre to the Palace, where the royal supper was spread in the great hall. She sat there in the middle at a marble table, under a canopy of velvet powdered with gold fleurs de lys."

It will here be fitting to controvert a popular error which some persons have perpetuated, following Sauval in the mistake. It has been said that Henri II. carried his oblivion of decency so far as to place his mistress' initials even on the buildings which Catherine had advised him to undertake or to carry on at such lavish expense. But the cypher, which is to be seen at the Louvre, amply refutes those who have so little comprehension as to lend credit to such nonsense, a gratuitous slur on the honor of our kings and queens. The H for Henri and the two Cs, face to face, for Catherine seem indeed to make two Ds for Diane; and this coincidence was no doubt pleasing to the King. But it is not the less certain that the royal cypher was officially constructed of the initials of the King and the Queen. And this is so true that the same cypher is still to be seen on the corn-market in Paris which Catherine herself had built. It may also be found in the crypt of Saint-Denis on Catherine's tomb, which she caused to be constructed during her lifetime by the side of that of Henri II., and on which she is represented from life by the sculptor to whom she sat.

On a solemn occasion, when he was setting out on an expedition to Germany, Henri II. proclaimed Catherine Regent during his absence, as also in the event of his death—on March 25, 1552. Catherine's bitterest enemy, the author of the *Discours merveilleux sur les dèportements de Catherine II.*

("Strange Discourses on the Conduct of Catherine II."), admits that she acquitted herself of these functions to the general approbation, and that the King was satisfied with her administration. Henri II. had men and money at the right moment. And after the disastrous day of Saint-Quentin, Catherine obtained from the Parisians considerable sums, which she forwarded to Compiègne, whither the King had come.

In politics Catherine made immense efforts to acquire some little influence. She was clever enough to gain over to her interests the Connétable de Montmorency, who was all-powerful under Henri II. The King's terrible reply to Montmorency's insistency is well known. This answer was the result of the good advice given by Catherine in the rare moments when she was alone with the King, and could explain to him the policy of the Florentines, which was to set the magnates of a kingdom by the ears and build up the sovereign authority on the ruins—Louis XI.'s system, subsequently carried out by Richelieu. Henri II., who saw only through the eyes of Diane and the Connétable, was quite a feudal King, and on friendly terms with the great Houses of the realm.

After an ineffectual effort in her favor made by the Connétable, probably in the year 1556, Catherine paid great court to the Guises, and schemed to detach them from Diane's party so as to set them in opposition to Montmorency. But, unfortunately, Diane and the Connétable were as virulent against the Protestants as the Guises were. Hence their antagonism lacked the virus which religious feeling would have given it. Beside, Diane boldly defied the Queen's plans by coquetting with the Guises and giving her daughter to the Duc d'Aumale. She went so far that she has been accused by some writers of granting more than smiles to the gallant Cardinal de Lorraine.*

* Some satirist of the time has left the following lines on Henry II. [in which the pun on the words Sire and Cire (wax) would be lost in translation]:

The signs of grief and the ostentatious regret displayed by Catherine on the King's death cannot be regarded as genuine. The fact that Henri II. had been so passionately and faithfully attached to Diane de Poitiers made it incumbent on Catherine that she should play the part of a neglected wife who idolized her husband; but, like every clever woman, she carried on her dissimulation, and never ceased to speak with tender regret of Henri II. Diane herself, it is well known, wore mourning all her life for her husband, Monsieur de Brézé. Her colors were black and white, and the King was wearing them at the tournament where he was fatally wounded. Catherine, in imitation no doubt of her rival, wore mourning for the King to the end of her life.

On the King's death, the Duchesse de Valentintois was shamelessly deserted and dishonored by the Connétable de Montmorency, a man in every respect beneath his reputation. Diane sent to offer her estate and château of Chenonceaux to the Queen. Catherine then replied in the presence of witnesses, "I can never forget that she was all the joy of my dear Henri; I should be ashamed to accept, I will give her an estate in exchange. I would propose that of Chaumont-on-the-Loire." The deed of exchange was, in fact, signed at Blois in 1559. Diane, whose sons-in-law were the Duc d'Aumale and the Duc de Bouillon, kept her whole fortune and died peacefully in 1566 at the age of sixty-six. She was thus nineteen years older than Henri II. These dates, copied from the epitaph on her tomb by a historian who studied the question at the end of the last century, clear up many historical difficulties; for many writers have said she was forty when

> "Sire, si vous laissez, comme Charles désire,
> Comme Diane veut, par trop vous gouverner,
> Fondre, pétrir, mollir, refondre, retourner,
> Sire, vous n'êtes plus, vous n'êtes plus que cire."

Charles was the Cardinal de Lorraine.

her father was sentenced in 1523, while others have said she was but sixteen. She was, in fact, four-and-twenty.

After reading everything both for and against her conduct with Francis I., at the time when the House of Poitiers was in the greatest danger, we can neither confirm nor deny anything. It is a passage of history that still remains obscure. We can see by what happens in our own day how history is falsified, as it were, in the making.

Catherine, who founded great hopes on her rival's age, several times made an attempt to overthrow her. On one occasion she was very near the accomplishment of her hopes. In 1554, Madame Diane, being ill, begged the King to go to Saint-Germain pending her recovery. This sovereign coquette would not be seen in the midst of the paraphernalia of doctors, nor bereft of the adjuncts of dress. To receive the King on his return, Catherine arranged a splendid *ballet*, in which five or six young ladies were to address him in verse. She selected for the purpose Miss Fleming, related to her uncle, the Duke of Albany, and one of the loveliest girls imaginable, fair and golden-haired ; then a young connection of her own, Clarissa Strozzi, with magnificent black hair and rarely fine hands ; Miss Lewiston, maid of honor to Mary Stewart ; Mary Stewart herself ; Madame Elisabeth de France, the unhappy Queen of Spain ; and Madame Claude. Elisabeth was nine years old, Claude eight, and Mary Stewart twelve. Obviously, the Queen aimed at showing off Clarissa Strozzi and Miss Fleming without other rivals in the King's eyes. The King succumbed : he fell in love with Miss Fleming, and she bore him a son, Henri de Valois, Comte d'Angoulême, Grand Prior of France.

But Diane's influence and position remained unshaken. Like Madame de Pompadour later with Louis XV., the Duchesse de Valentinois was forgiving. But to what sort of love are we to ascribe this scheme on Catherine's part ? Love of power or love of her husband ? Women must decide.

A great deal is said in these days as to the license of the press; but it is difficult to imagine to what a pitch it was carried when printing was a new thing. Aretino, the Voltaire of his time, as is well known, made monarchs tremble, and foremost of them all Charles V. But few people know, perhaps, how far the audacity of pamphleteers could go. This château of Chenonceaux had been given to Diane, nay, she was entreated to accept it, to induce her to overlook one of the most horrible publications ever hurled at a woman, one which shows how violent was the animosity between her and Madame d'Etampes. In 1537, when she was eight-and-thirty, a poet of Champagne, named Jean Voûté, published a collection of Latin verses, and among them three epigrams aimed at her. We must conclude that the poet was under high patronage from the fact that his volume is introduced by an *eulogium* written by Simon Macrin, the King's First Gentleman of the Bedchamber. Here is the only passage quotable to-day from these epigrams, which bear the title: *In Pictaviam, anum aulicam.* (Against *la Poitiers*, an old woman of the Court.)

"Non trahit esca ficta prædam."

"A painted bait catches no game," says the poet, after telling her that she paints her face and buys her teeth and hair; and he goes on: "Even if you could buy the finest essence that makes a woman, you would not get what you want of your lover, for you would need to be living, and you are dead."

This volume, printed by Simon de Colines, was dedicated "To a Bishop!"—To François Bohier, the brother of the man who, to save his credit at Court and atone for his crime, made an offering on the accession of Henri II. of the château of Chenonceaux, built by his father, Thomas Bohier, Councilor of State under four Kings: Louis XI., Charles VIII., Louis XII., and Francis I. What were the pamphlets pub-

lished against Madame de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette in comparison with verses that might have been written by Martial! Voûté must have come to a bad end. Thus the estate and château of Chenonceaux cost Diane nothing but the forgiveness of an offense—a duty enjoined by the Gospel. Not being assessed by a jury, the penalties inflicted on the press were rather severer then than they are now.

The widowed Queens of France were required to remain for forty days in the King's bedchamber, seeing no light but that of the tapers; they might not come out till after the funeral. This inviolable custom annoyed Catherine greatly; she was afraid of cabals. She found a way to evade it. The Cardinal de Lorraine coming out one morning—at such a time! at such a juncture!—from the house of "the Fair Roman," a famous courtesan of that day, who lived in the Rue Culture-Sainte-Catherine, was roughly handled by a party of roisterers. "Whereat his holiness was much amazed," says Henri Estienne, "and gave it out that heretics were lying in wait for him." And on this account the Court moved from Paris to Saint-Germain. The Queen would not leave the King her son behind, but took him with her.

The accession of Francis II., the moment when Catherine proposed to seize the reins of power, was a disappointment that formed a cruel climax to the twenty-six years of endurance she had already spent at the French Court. The Guises, with incredible audacity, at once usurped the sovereign power. The Duc de Guise was placed in command of the army and the Connétable de Montmorency was shelved. The cardinal took the control of the finances and the clergy.

Catherine's political career opened with one of those dramas which, though it was less notorious than some others, was not the less horrible, and initiated her no doubt into the agitating shocks of her life. Whether it was that Catherine, after vainly trying the most violent remedies, had thought she might bring the King back to her through jealousy;

whether on coming to her second youth she had felt it hard never to have known love, she had shown a warm interest in a gentleman of royal blood, François de Vendôme, son of Louis de Vendôme—the parent House of the Bourbons—the Vidame de Chartres, the name by which he is known to history. Catherine's covert hatred of Diane betrayed itself in many ways, which historians, studying only political developments, have failed to note with due attention. Catherine's attachment to the Vidame arose from an insult offered by the young man to the favorite. Diane looked for the most splendid matches for her daughters, who were indeed of the best blood in the kingdom. Above all, she was ambitious of an alliance with the Royal family. And her second daughter, who became the Duchesse d'Aumale, was proposed in marriage to the Vidame, whom Francis I., with sage policy, kept in poverty. For, in fact, when the Vidame de Chartres and the Prince de Condé first came to Court, Francis I. gave them appointments! What? the office of chamberlains in ordinary, with twelve hundred crowns a year, as much as he bestowed on the humblest of his gentlemen. And yet, though Diane offered him immense wealth, some high office under the Crown, and the King's personal favor, the Vidame refused. And then this Bourbon, factious as he was, married Jeanne, daughter of the Baron d'Estissac, by whom he had no children.

This proud demeanor naturally commended the Vidame to Catherine, who received him with marked favor, and made him her devoted friend. Historians have compared the last Duc de Montmorency, who was beheaded at Toulouse, with the Vidame de Chartres for his power of charming, his merits, and his talents.

Henri II. was not jealous; he did not apparently think it possible that a Queen of France could fail in her duty, or that a Medici could forget the honor done her by a Valois. When the Queen was said to be flirting with the Vidame de

Chartres, she had been almost deserted by the King since the birth of her last child. So this attempt came to nothing—as the King died wearing the colors of Diane de Poitiers.

So, at the King's death, Catherine was on terms of gallant familiarity with the Vidame, a state of things in no way out of harmony with the manners of the time, when love was at once so chivalrous and so licentious that the finest actions seemed as natural as the most blamable. But, as usual, historians have blundered by regarding exceptional cases as the rule.

Henri II.'s four sons nullified every pretension of the Bourbons, who were all miserably poor, and crushed under the scorn brought upon them by the Connétable de Montmorency's treason, in spite of the reasons which had led him to quit the country. The Vidame de Chartres, who was to the Prince de Condé what Richelieu was to Mazarin, a father in politics, a model, and yet more a master in gallantry, hid the vast ambition of his family under a semblance of levity. Being unable to contend with the Guises, the Montmorencys, the Princes of Scotland, the cardinals, and the Bouillons, he aimed at distinction by his gracious manners, his elegance, and his wit, which won him the favors of the most charming women, and the hearts of many he never thought about. He was a man privileged by nature, whose fascinations were irresistible, and who owed to his love affairs the means of keeping up his rank. The Bourbons would not have taken offense, like Jarnac, at la Châtaignerie's scandal; they were very ready to accept lands and houses from their mistresses—witness the Prince de Condé, who had the estate of Saint-Valery from Madame la Maréchale de Saint-André.

During the first twenty days of mourning for Henri II., a sudden change came over the Vidame's prospects. Courted by the Queen-mother, and courting her as a man may court a queen, in the utmost secrecy, he seemed fated to play an important part; and Catherine, in fact, resolved to make him

useful. The Prince received letters from her to the Prince de Condé, in which she pointed out the necessity for a coalition against the Guises. The Guises, informed of this intrigue, made their way into the Queen's chamber to compel her to sign an order consigning the Vidame to the Bastille, and Catherine found herself under the cruel necessity of submitting. The Vidame died after a few months' captivity, on the day when he came out of prison, a short time before the Amboise conspiracy.

This was the end of Catherine de' Medici's first and only love affair. Protestant writers declare that the Queen had had him poisoned to bury the secret of her gallantries in the tomb.

Such was this woman's apprenticeship to the exercise of royal power.

PART I.

THE CALVINIST MARTYR.

Few persons in these days know how artless were the dwellings of the citizens of Paris in the sixteenth century, and how simple their lives. This very simplicity of habits and thought, perhaps, was the cause of the greatness of this primitive citizen class—for they were certainly great, free, and noble; more so, perhaps, than the citizens of our time. Their history remains to be written; it requires and awaits a man of genius. Inspired by an incident which, though little known, forms the basis of this narrative, and is one of the most remarkable in the history of the citizen class, this reflection will no doubt occur to every one who shall read it to the end. Is it the first time in history that the conclusion has come before the facts?

In 1560, the houses of the Rue de la Vieille-Pelleterie (old furrieries) lay close to the left bank of the Seine, between the Notre-Dame Bridge and the bridge to the Exchange. The public way and the houses occupied the ground now given up to the single path of the present quay. Each house, rising from the river, had a way down to it by stone or wooden steps, defended by strong iron gates or doors of nail-studded timber. These houses, like those of Venice, had a door to the land and one to the water. At the moment of writing this sketch, only one house remains of this kind as a reminiscence of old Paris, and that is doomed soon to disappear; it stands at the corner of the Petit-Pont, the *little bridge* facing the guard-house of the Hôtel-Dieu.

Of old each dwelling presented, on the river-side, the peculiar physiognomy stamped on it either by the trade and the habits of its owners, or by the eccentricity of the constructions devised by them for utilizing or defiling the Seine. The

bridges being built, and almost all choked up by more mills than were convenient for the requirements of navigation, the Seine in Paris was divided into as many pools as there were bridges. Some of these old Paris basins would have afforded delightful studies of color for the painter. What a forest of timbers was built into the cross-beams that supported the mills, with their immense sails and wheels! What curious effects were to be found in the joists that shored up the houses from the river. Genre painting as yet, unfortunately, was not, and engraving in its infancy; so we have no record of the curious scenes which may still be found, on a small scale, in some provincial towns where the rivers are fringed with wooden houses, and where, as at Vendôme, for instance, the pools, overgrown with tall grasses, are divided by railings to separate the various properties on each bank.

The name of this street, which has now vanished from the map, sufficiently indicates the kind of business carried on there. At that time the merchants engaged in any particular trade, far from dispersing themselves about the city, gathered together for mutual protection. Being socially bound by the guild which limited their increase, they were also united into a brotherhood by the church. This kept up prices. And then the masters were not at the mercy of their workmen and did not yield, as they do now, to all their vagaries; on the contrary, they took charge of them, treated them as their children, and taught them the finer mysteries of their craft. A workman, to become a master, was required to produce a masterpiece—always an offering to the patron saint of the guild. And will you venture to assert that the absence of competition diminished their sense of perfection or hindered beauty of workmanship, when your admiration of the work of the older craftsmen has created the new trade of dealers in *bric-a-brac*?

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the fur trade was one of the most flourishing industries. The difficulty of obtaining furs, which, coming from the North, necessitated

long and dangerous voyages, gave a high value to skins and furriers' work. Then, as now, high prices led to demand, for vanity knows no obstacles.

In France, and in other kingdoms, not only was the use of furs restricted by law to the great nobility, as is proved by the part played by ermine in ancient coats-of-arms; but certain rare furs, such as *vair*, which was beyond doubt imperial sable, might be worn only by kings, dukes, and men of high rank holding certain offices. *Vair* (a name still used in heraldry, *vair* and *counter vair*) was subdivided into *grand vair* and *menu vair*. The word has within the last hundred years fallen so completely into disuse, that in hundreds of editions of Perrault's fairy tales, Cinderella's famous slipper, probably of fur, *menu vair*, has become a glass slipper, *pantoufle de verre*. Not long since a distinguished French poet was obliged to restore and explain the original spelling of this word, for the edification of his brethren of the press, when giving an account of the "Cenerentola," in which a ring is substituted for the symbolical slipper—an unmeaning change.

The laws against the use of fur were, of course, perpetually transgressed, to the great advantage of the furriers. The high price of textiles and of furs made a garment in those days a durable thing, in keeping with the furniture, armor, and general details of the sturdy life of the time. A nobleman or lady, every rich man as well as every citizen, possessed at most two dresses for each season, and they lasted a lifetime or more. These articles were bequeathed to their children. Indeed, the clauses relating to weapons and raiment in marriage-contracts, in these days unimportant by reason of the small value of clothes that are constantly renewed, were at that period of great interest. High prices had led to durability.

A lady's outfit represented a vast sum of money; it was included in her fortune, and safely bestowed in those enor-

mous chests which endanger the ceilings of modern houses. The full dress of a lady in 1840 would have been the dishabille of a fine lady of 1540. The discovery of America, the facility of transport, the destruction of social distinctions, which has led to the effacement of visible distinctions, have all contributed to reduce the furrier's craft to the low ebb at which it stands, almost to nothing. The article sold by a furrier at the same price as of old—say twenty livres—has fallen in value with the money: the livre or franc was then worth twenty of our present money. The citizen's wife or the courtesan who, in our day, trims her cloak with sable, does not know that in 1440 a malignant constable of the watch would have taken her forthwith into custody, and hailed her before the judge at le Châtelet. The English ladies who are so fond of ermine are unconscious of the fact that formerly none but queens, duchesses, and the Chancellor of France were permitted to wear this royal fur. There are at this day various ennobled families bearing the name of Pelletier or Lepelletier, whose forebears were obviously wealthy furriers; for most of our citizen names were originally surnames of that kind.

This digression not only explains the long squabbles as to precedence which the Drapers' Guild carried on for two centuries with the Mercers and the Furriers, each insisting on marching first, as being the most important, but also accounts for the consequence of one Master Lecamus, a furrier honored with the patronage of the two Queens, Catherine de' Medici and Mary Stewart, as well as that of the legal profession, who for twenty years had been the Syndic of his corporation, and who lived in this street. The house occupied by Lecamus was one of the three forming the three corners of the cross-roads at the end of the bridge to the Exchange, where only the tower now remains that formed the fourth corner. At the angle this house, forming the corner of the bridge and

of the quay, now called the Quai aux Fleurs, the architect had placed a niche for a Madonna, before whom tapers constantly burned, with posies of real flowers in their season and artificial flowers in the winter.

On the side toward the Rue du Pont, as well as on that to the Rue de la Vieille-Pelleterie, the house was supported on wooden pillars. All the houses of the trading quarters were thus constructed, with an arcade beneath, where foot passengers walked under cover on a floor hardened by the mud they brought in, which made it a rather rough pavement. In all the towns of France these arcades have been called *piliers*—in England *rows*—a general term to which the name of a trade is commonly added, as "Piliers des Halles," "Piliers de la Boucherie." These covered ways, required by the changeable and rainy climate of Paris, gave the town a highly characteristic feature, but they have entirely disappeared. Just as there now remains one house only on the river bank, so no more than about a hundred feet are left of the old *piliers* in the market, the last that have survived until now; and in a few days this remnant of the gloomy labyrinth of old Paris will also be destroyed. The existence of these relics of the Middle Ages is, no doubt, incompatible with the splendor of modern Paris. And these remarks are not intended as a lament over those fragments of the old city, but as a verification of this picture by the last surviving examples now falling into dust, and to win forgiveness for such descriptions, which will be precious in the future which is following hard on the heels of this age.

The walls were of timber covered with slates. The spaces between the timbers had been filled up with bricks, in a way that may still be seen in some provincial towns, laid in a zigzag pattern known as *Point de Hongrie*. The window-sills and lintels, also of wood, were handsomely carved, as were the corner tabernacle above the Madonna, and the pillars in front of the store. Every window, every beam dividing the

stories, was graced with arabesques of fantastic figures and animals wreathed in scrolls of foliage. On the street-side, as on the river-side, the house was crowned with a high-pitched roof having a gable to the river and one to the street. This roof, like that of a Swiss chalet, projected far enough to cover a balcony on the third floor with an ornamental balustrade; here the mistress might walk under shelter and command a view of the street, or of the pool shut in between two bridges and two rows of houses.

Houses by the river were at that time highly valued. The system of drainage and water-supply was not yet invented; the only main drain was one around Paris, constructed by Aubriot, the first man of genius and determination who—in the time of Charles V.—thought of sanitation for Paris. Houses situated like this of the Sieur Lecamus found in the river a necessary water-supply, and a natural outlet for rain-water and waste. The vast works of this kind under the direction of the Trade Provosts are only now disappearing. None but octogenarians can still remember having seen the pits which swallowed up the surface-waters, in the Rue Montmartre, Rue du Temple, etc. These hideous yawning culverts were in their day of inestimable utility. Their place will probably be for ever marked by the sudden rising of the roadway over what was their open channel—another archæological detail which, in a couple of centuries, the historian will find inexplicable.

One day, in 1816, a little girl, who had been sent to an actress at the Ambigu with some diamonds for the part of a queen, was caught in a storm, and so irresistibly swept away by the waters to the opening of the drain in the Rue du Temple, that she would have been drowned in it but for the help of a passer-by, who was touched by her cries. But she had dropped the jewels, which were found in a man-hole. This accident made a great commotion and gave weight to the demands for the closing of these gulfs for swallowing

water and little girls. These curious structures, five feet high, had more or less movable gratings, which led to the flooding of cellars when the stream produced by heavy rain was checked by the grating being choked with rubbish, which the residents often forgot to remove.

The front of Master Lecamus' store was a large window, but filled in with small panes of leaded glass, which made the place very dark. The furs for wealthy purchasers were carried to them for inspection. To those who came to buy in the store, the goods were displayed outside between the pillars, which, during the day, were always more or less blocked by tables and salesmen sitting on stools, as they could still be seen doing under the arcade of the Halles some fifteen years since. From these outposts the clerks, apprentices, and sewing girls could chat, question, and answer each other, and hail the passer-by in a way which Walter Scott has depicted in the "Fortunes of Nigel." The signboard, representing an ermine, was hung out as we still see those of village inns, swinging from a handsome arm of pierced and gilt ironwork. Over the ermine were these words:

LECAMUS

FURRIER

TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN AND THE KING OUR SOVEREIGN LORD

On one side, and on the other:

TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN-MOTHER
AND TO THE GENTLEMEN OF THE PARLEMENT.

The words "To Her Majesty the Queen" had been lately added; the gilt letters were new. This addition was a consequence of the recent changes produced by Henri II.'s sudden

and violent death, which overthrew many fortunes at Court and began that of the Guises.

The back store looked over the river. In this room sat the worthy citizen and his wife, Mademoiselle Lecamus. The wife of a man who was not noble had not at that time any right to the title of Dame, or lady; but the wives of the citizens of Paris were allowed to call themselves Demoiselle (as we might say Mistress), as part of the privileges granted and confirmed to their husbands by many kings to whom they had rendered great services. Between this back room and the front store was a spiral ladder or staircase of wood, a sort of corkscrew leading up to the next story, where the furs were stored, to the old couple's bedroom, and again to the attics, lighted by dormer windows, where their children slept, the maidservant, the clerks, and the apprentices.

This herding of families, servants, and apprentices, and the small space allotted to each in the dwelling, where the apprentices all slept in one large room under the tiles, accounts for the enormous population at that time crowded together in Paris on a tenth of the ground now occupied by the city, and also for the many curious details of mediæval life, and the cunning love affairs, though these, *pace* the grave historian, are nowhere recorded but by the story-writers, and without them would have been lost.

At this time a grand gentleman—such as the Admiral de Coligny, for instance—had three rooms for himself in Paris, and his people lived in a neighboring hostelry. There were not fifty mansions in all Paris, not fifty palaces, that is to say, belonging to the sovereign princes or great vassals, whose existence was far superior to that of the greatest German rulers, such as the Duke of Bavaria or the Elector of Saxony.

The kitchen in the Lecamus' house was on the river-side below the back store. It had a glass door opening on to an ironwork balcony, where the cook could stand to draw up water in a pail and to wash the household linen. Thus the

back store was at once the sitting-room, the dining-room, and the counting-house. It was in this important room—always fitted with richly carved wood and adorned by some chest or artistic article of furniture—that the merchant spent most of his life; there he had jolly suppers after his day's work; there were held secret debates on the political interests of the citizens and the Royal family. The formidable guilds of Paris could at that time arm a hundred thousand men. Their resolutions were stoutly upheld by their serving-men, their clerks, their apprentices, and their workmen. Their provost was their commander-in-chief, and they had, in the Hôtel de Ville, a palace where they had a right to assemble.

In that famous "citizens' parlor" (*parlouer aux bourgeois*) very solemn decisions were taken. But for the continual sacrifices which had made war unendurable to the guilds, wearied out with losses and famine, Henri IV., a rebel-made king, might never have entered Paris.

Every reader may now imagine for himself the characteristic appearance of this corner of Paris where the bridge and the quay now open out, where the trees rise from the Quai aux Fleurs, and where nothing is left of the past but the lofty and famous clock-tower whence the signal was tolled for the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew. Strange coincidence! One of the houses built round the foot of that tower—at that time surrounded by wooden stores—the house of the Lecamus, was to be the scene of one of the incidents that led to that night of horrors, which proved, unfortunately, propitious rather than fatal to Calvinism.

At the moment when this story begins, the audacity of the new religious teaching was setting Paris by the ears. A Scotchman, named Stewart, had just assassinated President Minard, that member of the Parlement to whom public opinion attributed a principal share in the execution of Anne du Bourg, a councilor burnt on the Place de Grève after the

tailor of the late King, who had been tortured in the presence of Henry II. and Diane de Poitiers. Paris was so closely watched that the archers on guard compelled every passer-by to pray to the Virgin, in order to detect heretics, who yielded unwillingly, or even refused to perform an act opposed to their convictions.

The two archers on guard at the corner of the Lecamus' house had just gone off duty; thus Christophe, the furrier's son, strongly suspected of deserting the Catholic faith, had been able to go out without fear of being compelled to adore the Virgin's image. At seven in the evening of an April day, 1560, night was falling, and the apprentices, seeing only a few persons walking along the arcades on each side of the street, were carrying in the goods laid out for inspection preparatory to closing the house and the store. Christophe Lecamus, an ardent youth of two-and-twenty, was standing in the door, apparently engaged in looking after the apprentices.

"Monsieur," said one of these lads to Christophe, pointing out a man who was pacing two and fro under the arcade with a doubtful expression, "that is probably a spy or a thief, but whatever he is, such a lean wretch cannot be an honest man. If he wanted to speak to us on business, he would come up boldly instead of creeping up and down as he is doing. And what a face!" he went on, mimicking the stranger, "with his nose hidden in his cloak! What a jaundiced eye, and what a starved complexion!"

As soon as the stranger thus described saw Christophe standing alone in the doorway, he hastily crossed from the opposite arcade where he was walking, came under the pillars of the Lecamus' house, and, passing along by the store before the apprentices had come out again to close the shutters, he went up to the young man.

"I am Chaudieu!" he said in a low voice.

On hearing the name of one of the most famous ministers, and one of the most heroic actors in the terrible drama called

the Reformation, Christophe felt such a thrill as a faithful peasant would have felt on recognizing his King under a disguise.

"Would you like to see some furs?" said Christophe, to deceive the apprentices whom he heard behind him. "Though it is almost dark, I can show you some myself."

He invited the minister to enter, but the man replied that he would rather speak to him out of doors. Christophe fetched his cap and followed the Calvinist.

Chaudieu, though banished by an edict, as secret plenipotentiary of Théodore de Bèze and Calvin—who directed the Reformation in France from Geneva—went and came, defying the risk of the horrible death inflicted by the Parlement, in concert with the church and the monarch, on a leading reformer, the famous Anne du Bourg. This man, whose brother was a captain in the army and one of Admiral Coligny's best warriors, was the arm used by Calvin to stir up France at the beginning of the twenty-two years of religious wars which were on the eve of an outbreak. This preacher of the reformed faith was one of those secret wheels which may best explain the immense spread of the Reformation.

Chaudieu led Christophe down to the edge of the water by an underground passage like that of the Arche Marion, filled in some ten years since. This tunnel between the house of Lecamus and that next it ran under the Rue de la Vieille-Pelleterie, and was known as le Pont aux Fourreurs. It was used by the dyers of the city as a way down to the river to wash their thread, silk, and materials. A little boat lay there, held and rowed by one man. In the bows sat a stranger, a small man, and very simply dressed. In an instant the boat was in the middle of the river, and the boatman steered it under one of the wooden arches of the Pont au Change, where he quickly secured it to an iron ring. No one had said a word.

"Here we may talk in safety, there are neither spies nor traitors," said Chaudieu to the two others. "Are you filled with

the spirit of self-sacrifice that should animate a martyr? Are you ready to suffer all things for our holy cause? Do you fear the torments endured by the late King's tailor and the Councilor du Bourg, which of a truth await us all?" He spoke to Christophe, looking at him with a radiant face.

"I will testify to the Gospel," replied Christophe simply, looking up at the windows of the back store.

The familiar lamp standing on a table, where his father was no doubt balancing his books, reminded him by its mild beam of the peaceful life and family joys he was renouncing. It was a brief but complete vision. The young man's fancy took in the homely harmony of the whole scene—the places where he had spent his happy childhood, where Babette Lallier lived, his future wife, where everything promised him a calm and busy life; he saw the past, he saw the future, and he sacrificed it all. At any rate, he staked it.

Such were men in those days.

"We need say no more," cried the impetuous boatman. "We know him for one of the saints. If the Scotchman had not dealt the blow, he would have killed the infamous Minard."

"Yes," said Lecamus, "my life is in the hands of the brethren, and I devote it with joy for the success of the Reformation. I have thought of it all seriously. I know what we are doing for the joy of the nations. In two words, the Papacy makes for celibacy, the Reformation makes for the family. It is time to purge France of its monks, to restore their possessions to the Crown, which will sell them sooner or later to the middle-classes. Let us show that we can die for our children and to make our families free and happy!"

The young enthusiast's face, with Chaudieu's, the boatman's, and that of the stranger seated in the bows, formed a picture that deserves to be described, all the more so because such a description entails the whole history of that epoch, if

it be true that it is given to some men to sum up in themselves the spirit of their age.

Religious reform, attempted in Germany by Luther, in Scotland by John Knox, and in France by Calvin, found partisans chiefly among those of the lower classes who had begun to think. The great nobles encouraged the movement only to serve other interests quite foreign to the religious question. These parties were joined by adventurers, by gentlemen who had lost all, by youngsters to whom every form of excitement was acceptable. But, among the artisans and men employed in trade, faith was genuine and founded on intelligent interests. The poorer nations at once gave their adherence to a religion which brought the property of the church back to the State, which suppressed the convents, and deprived the dignitaries of the church of their enormous revenues. Everybody in trade calculated the profits from this religious transaction, and devoted themselves to it body, soul, and purse; and among the youth of the French citizen class the new preaching met that noble disposition for self-sacrifice of every kind which animates the young to whom egoism is unknown.

Eminent men, penetrating minds, such as are always to be found among the masses, foresaw the Republic in the Reformation, and hoped to establish throughout Europe a form of government like that of the United Netherlands, which at last triumphed over the greatest power of the time—Spain, ruled by Philip II., and represented in the Low Countries by the Duke of Alva. Jean Hotoman was at that time planning the famous book in which this scheme is set forth, which diffused through France the leaven of these ideas, stirred up once more by the League,* subdued by Richelieu, and afterward by Louis XIV., to reappear with the Economists and the Encyclopædists under Louis XV., and burst into life under Louis XVI.; ideas which were always approved by the

* Headed by Henry, Duke of Guise, 1576.

younger branches, by the House of Orleans in 1789, as by the House of Bourbon in 1589.

The questioning spirit is the rebellious spirit. A rebellion is always either a cloak to hide a prince or the swaddling wrapper of a new rule. The House of Bourbon, a younger branch than the Valois, was busy at the bottom of the Reformation. At the moment when the little boat lay moored under the arch of the Pont au Change, the question was further complicated by the ambition of the Guises, the rivals of the Bourbons. Indeed, the Crown, as represented by Catherine de' Medici, could, for thirty years, hold its own in the strife by setting these two factions against each other; whereas later, instead of being clutched at by many hands, the Crown stood face to face with the people without a barrier between; for Richelieu and Louis XIV. had broken down the nobility, and Louis XV. had overthrown the Parlements. Now a king alone face to face with a nation, as Louis XVI. was, must inevitably succumb.

Christophe Lecamus was very typical of the ardent and devoted sons of the people. His pale complexion had that warm burnt hue which is seen in some fair people; his hair was of a coppery yellow; his eyes were bluish-gray and sparkled brightly. In them alone was his noble soul visible, for his clumsy features did not disguise the somewhat triangular shape of a plain face by lending it the look of dignity which a man of rank can assume, and his forehead was low and characteristic only of great energy. His vitality seemed to be seated no lower down than his chest, which was somewhat hollow. Sinewy, rather than muscular, Christophe was of tough texture, lean but wiry. His sharp nose showed homely cunning and his countenance revealed intelligence of the kind that acts wisely on one point of a circle, but that has not the power of commanding the whole circumference. His eyes, set under brows that projected like a pent-house and faintly outlined with light down, were surrounded with broad

light-blue circles, with a sheeny white patch at the root of the nose, almost always a sign of great excitability. Christophe was of the people—the race that fights and allows itself to be deceived; intelligent enough to understand and to serve an idea, too noble to take advantage of it, too magnanimous to sell himself.

By the side of old Lecamus' only son, Chaudieu, the ardent minister, lean from watchfulness, with brown hair, a yellow skin, a contumacious brow, an eloquent mouth, fiery hazel eyes, and a short rounded chin, symbolized that Christian zeal which gave the Reformation so many fanatical and earnest preachers, whose spirit and boldness fired whole communities. This aide-de-camp of Calvin and Théodore de Bèze contrasted well with the furrier's son. He represented the living cause of which Christophe was the effect. You could not have conceived of the active firebrand of the popular machine under any other aspect.

The boatman, an impetuous creature, tanned by the open air, the dews of night, and the heats of the day, with firmly set lips, quick motions, a hungry, tawny eye like a vulture's, and crisp black hair, was the characteristic adventurer who risks his all in an undertaking as a gambler stakes his whole fortune on a card. Everything in the man spoke of terrible passions and a daring that would flinch at nothing. His quivering muscles were as able to keep silence as to speak. His look was assertive rather than noble. His nose, upturned but narrow, scented battle. He seemed active and adroit. In any age you would have known him for a party leader. He might have been Pizarro, Hernando Cortez, or Morgan the Destroyer if there had been no Reformation—a doer of violent deeds.

The stranger who sat on a seat, wrapped in his cloak, evidently belonged to the highest social rank. The fineness of his linen, the cut, material, and perfume of his raiment, the make and texture of his gloves, showed a man of the

Court, as his attitude, his haughtiness, his cool demeanor, and his flashing eye revealed a man of war. His appearance was at first somewhat alarming and inspired respect. We respect a man who respects himself. Though short and hunchbacked, his manner made good all the defects of his figure. The ice once broken, he had the cheerfulness of decisiveness and an indescribable spirit of energy which made him attractive. He had the blue eyes and the hooked nose of the House of Navarre, and the Spanish look of the marked physiognomy that was characteristic of the Bourbon kings.

With three words the scene became of the greatest interest.

"Well, then," said Chaudieu, as Christophe Lecamus made his profession of faith, "this boatman is la Renaudie; and this is Monsiegneur the Prince de Condé," he added turning to the hunchback.

Thus the four men were representative of the faith of the people, the intellect of eloquence, the arm of the soldier, and Royalty cast into the shade.

"You will hear what we require of you," the minister went on, after allowing a pause for the young man's astonishment. "To the end that you may make no mistakes, we are compelled to initiate you into the most important secrets of the Reformation."

The Prince and la Renaudie assented by a gesture, when the minister ceased speaking, to allow the Prince to say something if he should wish it. Like all men of rank engaged in conspiracies, who make it a principle not to appear before some critical moment, the Prince kept silence. Not from cowardice: at such junctures he was the soul of the scheme, shrank from no danger, and risked his head; but, with a sort of royal dignity, he left the explanation of the enterprise to the preacher, and was content to study the new instrument he was compelled to make use of.

"My son," said Chaudieu in Huguenot phraseology, "we are about to fight the first battle against the Roman whore.

In a few days our soldiers must perish at the stake, or the Guises must be dead. So, ere long, the King and the two Queens will be in our power. This is the first appeal to arms by our religion in France, and France will not lay them down until she has conquered—it is of the nation that I speak, and not of the kingdom. Most of the nobles of the kingdom see what the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Duke his brother are driving at. Under pretense of defending the Catholic faith, the House of Lorraine claims the Crown of France as its inheritance. It leans on the church, and has made it a formidable ally; the monks are its supporters, its acolytes and spies. It asserts itself as a protector of the throne it hopes to usurp, of the Valois whom it hopes to destroy.

"We have decided to rise up in arms, and it is because the liberties of the people are threatened as well as the interests of the nobility. We must stifle in its infancy a faction as atrocious as that of the Bourguignons, who of old put Paris and France to fire and sword. A Louis XI. was needed to end the quarrel between the Burgundians and the Crown, but now a Prince of Condé will prevent the Lorrains from going too far. This is not a civil war; it is a duel between the Guises and the Reformation—a duel to the death! We will see their heads laid low, or they shall crush ours!"

"Well spoken!" said the Prince.

"In these circumstances, Christophe," la Renaudie put in, "we must neglect no means of strengthening our party—for there is a party on the side of the Reformation, the party of offended rights, of the nobles who are sacrificed to the Guises, of the old army leaders so shamefully tricked at Fontainebleau, whence the cardinal banished them by erecting gibbets to hang those who should ask the King for the price of their outfit and arrears of pay."

"Yes, my son," said Chaudieu, seeing some signs of terror in Christophe, "that is what requires us to triumph by fighting instead of triumphing by conviction and martyrdom.

The Queen-mother is ready to enter into our views; not that she is prepared to abjure the Catholic faith—she has not got so far as that, but she may perhaps be driven to it by our success. Be that as it may, humiliated and desperate as she is at seeing the power she had hoped to wield at the King's death in the grasp of the Guises and alarmed by the influence exerted by the young Queen Marie, who is their niece and partisan, Queen Catherine will be inclined to lend her support to the princes and nobles who are about to strike a blow for her deliverance. At this moment, though apparently devoted to the Guises, she hates them, longs for their ruin, and will make use of us to oppose them; but Monseigneur can make use of her to oppose all the others. The Queen-mother will consent to all we propose. We have the Connétable on our side—Monseigneur has just seen him at Chantilly, but he will not stir without orders from his superiors. Being Monseigneur's uncle, he will not leave us in the lurch, and our generous Prince will not hesitate to rush into danger to enlist Anne de Montmorency.

"Everything is ready; and we have cast our eyes on you to communicate to Queen Catherine our treaty of alliance, our schemes for edicts, and the basis of the new rule. The Court is at Blois. Many of our friends are there; but those are our future chiefs—— and, like Monseigneur," and he bowed to the Prince, "they must never be suspected; we must sacrifice ourselves for them. The Queen-mother and our friends are under such close espionage that it is impossible to communicate with them through any one who is known or of any consequence. Such a person would be at once suspected, and would never be admitted to speak with Madame Catherine. God should indeed give us at this moment the shepherd David with his sling to attack Goliath de Guise. Your father—a good Catholic, more's the pity—is furrier to the two Queens; he always has some garment or trimming in hand for them; persuade him to send you to the Court.

You will arouse no suspicions and will not compromise Queen Catherine. Any one of our leaders might lose his head for an imprudence which should give rise to a suspicion of the Queen-mother's connivance with us. But where a man of importance, once caught out, gives a clue to suspicions, a nobody like you escapes scot-free. You see! The Guises have so many spies that nowhere but in the middle of the river can we talk without fear. So you, my son, are like a man on guard, doomed to die at his post. Understand that, if you are taken, you are abandoned by us all. If need be, we shall cast opprobrium and disgrace on you. If we should be forced to it, we should declare that you were a creature of the Guises whom they sent to play a part to implicate us. So what we ask of you is entire self-sacrifice."

"If you perish," said the Prince de Condé, "I pledge my word as a gentleman that your family shall be a sacred trust to the House of Navarre; I will bear it in my heart and serve it in every way."

"That word, my lord, is enough," replied Christophe, forgetting that this leader of faction was a Gascon. "We live in times when every man, prince or citizen, must do his duty."

"That is a true Huguenot! If all our men were like him," said la Renaudie, laying his hand on Christophe's shoulder, "we should have won by to-morrow."

"Young man," said the Prince, "I meant to show you that while Chaudieu preaches and the gentleman bears arms, the prince fights. Thus, in so fierce a game, every stake has its value."

"Listen," said la Renaudie; "I will not give you the papers till we reach Beaugency, for we must run no risks on the road. You will find me on the quay there; my face, voice, and clothes will be so different that you may not recognize me. But I will say to you, 'Are you a *Guépin?*' and you must reply, 'At your service.' As to the manner of proceed-

ing, I will tell you. You will find a horse at *la Pinte fleurie*, near Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. Ask there for Jean le Breton, who will take you to the stable and mount you on a nag of mine known to cover thirty leagues in eight hours. Leave Paris by the Bussy Gate. Breton has a pass for me; take it for yourself and be off, riding round outside the towns. You should reach Orleans by daybreak."

"And the horse?" asked Lecamus.

"He will hold out till you get to Orleans," replied la Renaudie. "Leave him outside the suburb of Bannier, for the gates are well guarded; we must not arouse suspicion. You, my friend, must play your part well. You must make up any story that may seem to you best to enable you to go to the third house on your left on entering Orleans; it is that of one Tourillon, a glover. Knock three raps on the door and call out, 'In the service of Messieurs de Guise!' The man affects to be a fanatical *Guisard;* we four only know that he is on our side. He will find you a boatman, such another as himself of course, but devoted to our cause. Go down to the river at once, get into a boat painted green with a white border. You ought to be at Beaugency by noonday to-morrow. There I will put you in the way of getting a boat to carry you down to Blois without running any danger. Our enemies the Guises do not command the Loire, only the river-ports.

"You may thus see the Queen in the course of to-morrow or of the next day."

"Your words are graven here," said Christophe, touching his forehead.

Chaudieu embraced his son with religious fervency; he was proud of him.

"The Lord protect you!" he said, pointing to the sunset which crimsoned the old roofs covered with shingles, and shot fiery gleams among the forest of beams round which the waters foamed.

"You are of the stock of old Jacques Bonhomme," said la Renaudie to Christophe, wringing his hand.

"We shall meet again, *monsieur*," said the Prince, with a gesture of infinite graciousness, almost of friendliness.

With a stroke of the oar, la Renaudie carried the young conspirator back to the steps leading up to the house, and the boat vanished at once under the arches of the Pont au Change.

Christophe shook the iron gate that closed the entrance from the river-side and called out; Mademoiselle Lecamus heard him, opened one of the windows of the back store, and asked how he came there. Christophe replied that he was half-frozen and that she must first let him in.

"Young master," said la Bourguignonne, "you went out by the street-door and come in by the river-gate? Your father will be in a pretty rage."

Christophe, bewildered by the secret conference which had brought him into contact with the Prince de Condé, la Renaudie, and Chaudieu, and even more agitated by the expected turmoil of an imminent civil war, made no reply; he hurried up from the kitchen to the back store. There, on seeing him, his mother, who was a bigoted old Catholic, could not contain herself.

"I will wager," she broke out, "that the three men you were talking to were ref——"

"Silence, wife," said the prudent old man, whose white head was bent over a book. "Now, you lazy oafs," he went on to three boys who had long since finished supper, "what are you waiting for to take you to bed? It is eight o'clock. You must be up by five in the morning. And first you have the Président de Thou's robes and cap to carry home. Go all three together, and carry sticks and rapiers. If you meet any more ne'er-do-weels of your own kidney, at any rate there will be three of you."

"And are we to carry the ermine surcoat ordered by the young Queen, which is to be delivered at the Hôtel de

Soissons, from whence there is an express to Blois and to the Queen-mother?" asked one of the lads.

"No," said the Syndic; "Queen Catherine's account amounts to three thousand crowns and I must get the money. I think I will go to Blois myself."

"I should not think of allowing you at your age, father, and in such times as these, to expose yourself on the high-roads. I am two-and-twenty; you may send me on this errand," said Christophe, with an eye on a box which he had no doubt contained the surcoat.

"Are you glued to the bench?" cried the old man to the apprentices, who hastily took up their rapiers and capes and Monsieur de Thou's fur gown.

This illustrious man was to be received on the morrow by the Parlement as their president; he had just signed the death-warrant of the Councilor du Bourg, and was fated, before the year was out, to sit in judgment on the Prince de Condé.

"La Bourguignonne," said the old man, "go and ask my neighbor Lallier if he will sup with us this evening, furnishing the wine; we will give the meal. And, above all, tell him to bring his daughter."

The Syndic of the Guild of Furriers was a handsome old man of sixty, with white hair and a broad high forehead. As furrier to the Court for forty years past, he had witnessed all the revolutions in the reign of Francis I., and had retained his royal patent in spite of feminine rivalries. He had seen the arrival at Court of Catherine de' Medici, then but just fifteen; he had seen her succumb to the Duchesse d'Etampes, her father-in-law's mistress, and to the Duchesse de Valentinois, mistress to the late King, her husband. But through all these changes the furrier had got into no difficulties, though the Court purveyors often fell into disgrace with the ladies they served. His prudence was as great as his wealth. He main-

tained an attitude of excessive humility. Pride had never caught him in its snares. The man was so modest, so meek, so obliging, so poor—at Court and in the presence of queens, princesses, and favorites—that his servility had saved his store sign.

Such a line of policy betrayed, of course, a cunning and clear-sighted man. Humble as he was to the outer world, at home he was a despot. He was the unquestioned master in his own house. He was highly respected by his fellow-merchants, and derived immense consideration from his long tenure of the first place in business. Indeed, he was gladly helpful to others; and, among the services he had done, the most important perhaps was the support he had long afforded to the most famous surgeon of the sixteenth century—Ambroise Paré, who owed it to Lecamus that he could pursue his studies. In all the disputes that arose between the merchants of the guild, Lecamus was for conciliatory measures. Thus general esteem had confirmed his supremacy among his equals, while his assumed character had preserved him the favor of the Court.

Having, for political reasons, manœuvred in his parish for the glory of his trade, he did what was needful to keep himself in a sufficient odor of sanctity with the priest of the church of Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs, who regarded him as one of the men most devoted in all Paris to the Catholic faith. Consequently, when the States-General were convoked, Lecamus was unanimously elected to represent the third estate by the influence of the priests, which was at that time enormous in Paris.

This old man was one of those deep and silent ambitious men who for fifty years are submissive to everybody in turn, creeping up from place to place, no one knowing how, till they are seen peacefully seated in a position which no one, not even the boldest, would have dared to admit was the goal of his ambition at the beginning of his life—so long was the

climb, so many gulfs were there to leap, into which he might fall! Lecamus, who had hidden away a large fortune, would run no risks, and was planning a splendid future for his son. Instead of that personal ambition which often sacrifices the future to the present, he had family ambition, a feeling that seems lost in these days, smothered by the stupid regulation of inheritance by law. Lecamus foresaw himself president of the Paris Parlement in the person of his grandson.

Christophe, the godson of the great historian, de Thou, had received an excellent education, but it had led him to skepticism and inquiry, which indeed were increasing apace among the students and Faculty of the University. Christophe was at present studying for the bar, the first step to a judgeship. The old furrier pretended to be undecided as to his son's career; sometimes he would make Christophe his successor, and sometimes he would have him a pleader; but in his heart he longed to see this son in the seat of a Councilor of the Parlement. The furrier longed to place the house of Lecamus on a par with the old and honored families of Paris citizens which had produced a Pasquier, a Molé, a Miron, a Séguier, Lamoignon, du Tillet, Lecoigneux, Lescalopier, the Goix, the Arnaulds—all the famous sheriffs and high provosts of corporations who had rallied to defend the throne.

To the end that Christophe might in that day do credit to his rank, he wanted him to marry the daughter of the richest goldsmith in the city, his neighbor Lallier, whose nephew, at a later day, presented the keys of Paris to Henri IV. The most deeply rooted purpose in the good man's heart was to spend half his own fortune and half of Lallier's in the purchase of a lordly estate, a long and difficult matter in those days.

But he was too deep a schemer, and knew the times too well, to overlook the great movements that were being hatched; he saw plainly, and saw truly, when he looked forward to the division of the kingdom into two camps. The

useless executions on the Place de l'Estrapade, that of Henry II.'s tailor, and that, still more recent, of the Councilor Anne du Bourg, beside the connivance of the reigning favorite in the time of Francis I., and of many nobles now, at the progress of reform, all were alarming indications. The furrier was determined, come what might, to remain faithful to the church, the Monarchy, and the Parlement, but he was secretly well content that his son should join the Reformation. He knew that he had wealth enough to ransom Christophe if the lad should ever compromise himself seriously; and then, if France should turn Calvinist, his son could save the family in any furious outbreaks in the capital such as the citizens could vividly remember, and as would recur again and again through four reigns.

Like Louis XI., the old furrier never confessed these thoughts even to himself; his cunning completely deceived his wife and his son. For many a day this solemn personage had been the recognized head of the most populous quarter of Paris—the heart of the city—bearing the title of *Quartenier*, which became notorious fifteen years later. Clothed in cloth, like every prudent citizen who obeyed the sumptuary laws, Master Lecamus—the Sieur Lecamus, a title he held in virtue of an edict of Charles V. permitting the citizens of Paris to purchase *Seigneuries*, and their wives to assume the fine title of *Demoiselle* or mistress—wore no gold chain, no silk; only a stout doublet with large buttons of blackened silver, wrinkled hose drawn up above his knees, and leather shoes with buckles. His shirt, of fine linen, was pulled out, in the fashion of the time, into full puffs through his half-buttoned vest and slashed trunks.

Though the full light of the lamp fell on the old man's broad and handsome head, Christophe had no inkling of the thoughts hidden behind that rich Dutch-looking complexion; still he understood that his old father meant to take some advantage of his affection for pretty Babette Lallier.

And Christophe, as a man who has laid his own schemes, smiled sadly when he heard the invitation sent to his fair mistress.

As soon as la Bourguignonne and the apprentices were gone, old Lecamus looked at his wife with an expression that fully showed his firm and resolute temper.

"You will never rest till you have got the boy hanged with your damned tongue!" said he in stern tones.

"I would rather see him hanged, but saved, than alive and a Huguenot," was the gloomy reply. "To think that the child I bore within me for nine months should not be a good Catholic, but hanker after the heresies of Colas—that he must spend all eternity in hell——!" and she began to cry.

"You old fool!" said the furrier, "then give him a chance of life, if only to convert him! Why, you said a thing, before the apprentices, which might set our house on fire and roast us all in it like fleas in straw."

The mother crossed herself, but said nothing.

"As for you," said the good man, with a scrutinizing look at his son, "tell me what you were doing out there on the water with—— Come close to me while I speak to you," he added, seizing his son by the arm and drawing him close to him while he whispered in the lad's ear—"with the Prince de Condé." Christophe started. "Do you suppose that the Court furrier does not know all their faces? And do you fancy that I am not aware of what is going on? Monseigneur the Grand Master has ordered out troops to Amboise. And when troops are removed from Paris to Amboise while the Court is at Blois, when they are marched by way of Chartres and Vendôme instead of by Orleans, the meaning is pretty clear, heh? Trouble is brewing.

"If the Queens want their surcoats, they will send for them. The Prince de Condé may be intending to kill the Messieurs de Guise, who on their part mean to get rid of him

perhaps. Of what use can a furrier's son be in such a broil? When you are married, when you are a pleader in the Parlement, you will be as cautious as your father. A furrier's son has no business to be of the new religion till all the rest of the world is. I say nothing against the Reformers; it is no business of mine; but the Court is Catholic, the two Queens are Catholic, the Parlement is Catholic: we serve them with furs, and we must be Catholic.

"You do not stir from here, Christophe, or I will place you with your godfather the Président de Thou, who will keep you at it, blackening paper night and day, instead of leaving you to blacken your soul in the hell-broth of these damned Genevese."

"Father," said Christophe, leaning on the back of the old man's chair, "send me off to Blois with Queen Marie's surcoat and to ask for the money, or I am a lost man. And you love me——"

"Lost!" echoed his father, without any sign of surprise. "If you stay here, you will not be lost. I shall know where to find you."

"I shall be killed."

"Why?"

"The most zealous Huguenots have cast their eyes on me to serve them in a certain matter, and if I fail to do what I have just promised they will kill me in the street, in the face of day, here, as Minard was killed. But if you send me to the Court on business of your own, I shall probably be able to justify my action to both parties. Either I shall succeed for them without running any risk, and so gain a good position in the party; or, if the danger is too great, I can do your business only."

The old man started to his feet as if his seat were of red-hot iron.

"Wife," said he, "leave us, and see that no one intrudes on Christophe and me."

When Mistress Lecamus had left the room, the furrier took his son by a button and led him to the corner of the room which formed the angle toward the bridge.

"Christophe," said he, quite into his son's ear, as he had just now spoken of the Prince de Condé, "be a Huguenot* if that is your pet vice, but with prudence, in your secret heart, and not in such a way as to be pointed at by every one in the neighborhood. What you have just told me shows me what confidence the leaders have in you. What are you to do at the Court?"

"I cannot tell you," said Christophe; "I do not quite know that myself yet."

"H'm, h'm," said the old man, looking at the lad, "the young rascal wants to hoodwink his father. He will go far! Well, well," he went on, in an undertone, "you are not going to Blois to make overtures to the Guises, nor to the little King our Sovereign, nor to little Queen Mary. All these are Catholics; but I could swear that the Italian Queen owes the Scotchwoman and the Lorrains some grudge: I know her. She has been dying to put a finger in the pie. The late King was so much afraid of her that, like the jewelers, he used diamond to cut diamond, one woman against another. Hence Queen Catherine's hatred of the poor Duchesse de Valentinois, from whom she took the fine Château of Chenonceaux. But for Monsieur le Connétable, the Duchess would have had her neck wrung at least——

"Hands off, my boy! Do not trust yourself within reach of the Italian woman, whose only passions are in her head; a bad sort that. Ay, the business you are sent to the Court to do will give you a bad headache, I fear," cried the father, seeing that Christophe was about to speak. "My boy, I have two schemes for your future life; you will not spoil them by being of service to Queen Catherine. But, for God's sake, keep your head on your shoulders! And the Guises would

* A term of unknown origin, applied to the Protestants.

cut it off as la Bourguignonne cuts off a turnip, for the people who are employing you would throw you over at once."

"I know that, father," said Christophe.

"And you are so bold as that! You know it, and you will risk it?"

"Yes, father."

"Why, the devil's in it!" cried the old man, hugging his son, "we may understand each other; you are your father's son. My boy, you will be a credit to the family, and your old father may be plain with you, I see. But do not be more of a Huguenot than the Messieurs de Coligny; and do not draw your sword. You are to be a man of the pen; stick to your part as a sucking lawyer. Well, tell me no more till you have succeeded. If I hear nothing of you for four days after you reach Blois, that silence will tell me that you are in danger. Then the old man will follow to save the young one. I have not sold furs for thirty years without knowing the seamy side of a Court robe. I can readily find means of opening doors."

Christophe stared with amazement at hearing his father speak thus; but he feared some parental snare, and held his tongue.

Then he said—

"Very well, make up the account; write a letter to the Queen. I must be off this moment, or dreadful things will happen."

"Be off? But how?"

"I will buy a horse. Write, for God's sake!"

"Here! Mother! Give your boy some money," the furrier called out to his wife.

She came in, flew to her chest, and gave a purse to Christophe, who excitedly kissed her.

"The account was ready," said his father; "here it is. I will write the letter."

Christophe took the bill and put it in his pocket.

"But at any rate you will sup with us," said the goodman. "In this extremity you and the Lallier girl must exchange rings."

"Well, I will go to fetch her," cried Christophe.

The young man feared some indecision in his father, whose character he did not thoroughly appreciate; he went up to his room, dressed, took out a small trunk, stole downstairs, and placed it with his cloak and rapier under a counter in the shop.

"What the devil are you about?" asked his father, hearing him there.

"I do not want any one to see my preparations for leaving; I have put everything under the counter," he whispered in reply.

"And here is the letter," said his father.

Christophe took the paper and went out as if to fetch their neighbor.

A few moments after Christophe had gone out, old Lallier and his daughter came in, preceded by a woman-servant carrying three bottles of old wine.

"Well, and where is Christophe?" asked the furrier and his wife.

"Christophe?" said Babette; "we have not seen him."

"A pretty rogue is my son!" cried Lecamus. "He tricks me as if I had no beard. Why, old gossip, what will come to us? We live in times when the children are all too clever for their fathers!"

"But he has long been regarded by all the neighbors as a mad follower of Colas," said Lallier.

"Defend him stoutly on that score," said the furrier to the goldsmith. "Youth is foolish, and runs after anything new; but Babette will keep him quiet, she is even newer than Calvin."

Babette smiled. She truly loved Christophe, was affronted by everything that was ever said against him. She was a girl

of the good, old middle-class type, brought up under her mother's eye, for she had never left her; her demeanor was as gentle and precise as her features; she was dressed in stuff of harmonious tones of gray; her ruff, plainly pleated, was a contrast by its whiteness to her sober gown; on her head was a black velvet cap, like a child's hood in shape, but trimmed, on each side of her face, with frills and ends of tan-colored gauze. Though she was fair-haired, with a white skin, she seemed cunning and crafty, though trying to hide her willingness under the expression of a simple and honest girl.

As long as the two women remained in the room, coming to and fro to lay the cloth, and place the jugs, the large pewter dishes, and the knives and forks, the goldsmith and his daughter, the furrier and his wife, sat in front of the high chimney-place, hung with red serge and black fringes, talking of nothing. It was in vain that Babette asked where Christophe could be; the young Huguenot's father and mother made ambiguous replies; but as soon as the party had sat down to their meal, and the two maids were in the kitchen, Lecamus said to his future daughter-in-law—

"Christophe is gone to the Court."

"To Blois! What a journey to take without saying good-by to me!" said Babette.

"He was in a great hurry," said his old mother.

"Old friend," said the furrier to Lallier, taking up the thread of the conversation, "we are going to see hot work in France; the Reformers are astir."

"If they win the day it will only be after long fighting, which will be very bad for trade," said Lallier, incapable of looking higher than the commercial point of view.

"My father, who had seen the end of the wars between the Bourguignons and the Armagnacs, told me that our family would never have lived through them if one of his grandfathers—his mother's father—had not been one of the Goix, the famous butchers at the Halle, who were attached to the

Bourguignons, while the other, a Lecamus, was on the side of the Armagnacs; they pretended to be ready to flay each other before the outer world, but at home they were very good friends. So we will try to save Christophe. Perhaps a time may come when he will save us."

"You are a cunning dog, neighbor," said the goldsmith.

"No," replied Lecamus. "The citizen class must take care of itself, the populace and the nobility alike owe it a grudge. Everybody is afraid of the middle-class in Paris excepting the King, who knows us to be his friends."

"You who know so much, and who have seen so much," said Babette timidly, "pray tell me what it is that the Reformers want."

"Ay, tell us that, neighbor!" cried the goldsmith. "I knew the late King's tailor, and I always took him to be a simple soul, with no great genius; he was much such another as you are, they would have given him the host without requiring him to confess, and all the time he was up to his eyes in this new religion. He! a man whose ears were worth many hundred thousand crowns. He must have known some secrets worth hearing for the King and Madame de Valentinois to be present when he was tortured."

"Ay! and terrible secrets too," said the furrier. "The Reformation, my friends," he went on, in a low voice, "will give the church lands back to the citizen class. When ecclesiastical privileges are annulled, the Reformers mean to claim equality of taxation for the nobles and the middle-class, and to have only the King above all alike—if indeed they have a king at all."

"What, do away with the throne?" cried Lallier.

"Well, neighbor," said Lecamus, "in the Low Countries the citizens govern themselves by provosts over them, who elect a temporary chief."

"God bless me! Neighbor, we might do all these fine things and still be Catholics," said the goldsmith.

"We are too old to see the triumph of the middle-class in Paris, but it will triumph, neighbor, all in good time, all in good time! Why, the King is bound to rely on us to hold his own, and we have always been well paid for our support. And the last time all the citizens were ennobled, and they had leave to buy manors, and take the names of their estates without any special letters patent from the King. You and I, for instance, grandsons of the Goix in the female line, are we not as good as many a nobleman?"

This speech was so alarming to the goldsmith and the two women that it was followed by a long silence. The leaven of 1789 was already germinating in the blood of Lecamus, who was not yet so old but that he lived to see the daring of his class under the League.

"Is business pretty firm in spite of all this turmoil?" Lallier asked the furrier's wife.

"It always upsets trade a little," said she.

"Yes, and so I have a great mind to make a lawyer of my son," added Lecamus. "People are always going to law."

The conversation then dwelt on the commonplace, to the goldsmith's great satisfaction, for he did not like political disturbances or over-boldness of thought.

The banks of the Loire, from Blois as far as Angers, were always greatly favored by the two last branches of the royal family who occupied the throne before the advent of the Bourbons. This beautiful valley so well deserves the preference of kings that one of our most elegant writers describes it as follows: "There is a province in France which is never sufficiently admired. As fragrant as Italy, as flowery as the banks of the Guadalquivir, beautiful beside with its own peculiar beauty. Wholly French, it has always been French, unlike our Northern provinces, debased by Teutonic influence, or our Southern provinces, which have been the concubines of the Moors, of the Spaniards, of every nation that has coveted

them—this pure, chaste, brave, and loyal tract is Touraine! There is the seat of historic France. Auvergne is Auvergne, Languedoc is Languedoc and nothing more; but Touraine is France, and the truly national river to us is the Loire which waters Touraine. We need not, therefore, be surprised to find such a quantity of monuments in the departments which have taken their names from that of the Loire and its derivations. At every step in that land of enchantment we come upon a picture of which the foreground is the river, or some calm reach, in whose liquid depths are mirrored a château, with its turrets, its woods, and its dancing springs. It was only natural that large fortunes should centre around spots where Royalty preferred to live, and where it so long held its Court, and that distinguished birth and merit should crowd thither and build palaces on a par with Royalty itself."

Is it not strange, indeed, that our sovereigns should never have taken the advice indirectly given them by Louis XI., and have made Tours the capital of the kingdom? Without any great expenditure, the Loire might have been made navigable so far for trading vessels and light ships of war. There the seat of Government would have been safe from surprise and high-handed invasion. There the strongholds of the north would not have needed such sums for their fortifications, which alone have cost as much money as all the splendors of Versailles. If Louis XIV. had listened to Vauban's advice, and had his palace built at Mont-Louis, between the Loire and the Cher, perhaps the Revolution of 1789 would never have taken place.

So these fair banks bear, at various spots, clear marks of royal favor. The castles of Chambord, Blois, Amboise, Chenonceaux, Chaumont, Plessis-les-Tours, all the residences built by kings' mistresses, by financiers, and noblemen, at Véretz, Azay-le-Rideau, Ussé, Villandri, Valençay, Chanteloup, and Duretal, some of which have disappeared, though most are still standing, are splendid buildings, full of the

wonders of the period that has been so little appreciated by the literary sect of Mediævalists.

Of all these castles, that of Blois, where the Court was then residing, is the one on which the magnificence of the Houses of Orleans and of Valois has most splendidly set its stamp; and it is the most curious to historians, archæologists, and Catholics. At that time it stood quite alone. The town, inclosed in strong walls with towers, lay below the stronghold, for at that time the castle served both as a citadel and as a country residence. Overlooking the town, of which the houses, then as now, climbed the hill on the right bank of the river, their blue slate roofs in close array, there is a triangular plateau, divided by a stream, now unimportant since it runs underground, but in the fifteenth century, as historians tell us, flowing at the bottom of a rather deep ravine, part of which remains as a deep hollow-way, almost a precipice, between the suburb and the castle.

It was on this plateau, with a slope to the north and south, that the Comtes de Blois built themselves a "castel" in the architecture of the twelfth century, where the notorious Thibault le Tricheur, Thibault le Vieux, and many more held a court that became famous. In those days of pure feudal rule, when the King was no more than *inter pares primus* (the first among equals), as a King of Poland finely expressed it, the Counts of Champagne, of Blois, and of Anjou, the mere Barons of Normandy, and the Dukes of Brittany lived in the style of sovereigns and gave kings to the proudest kingdoms. The Plantagenets of Anjou, the Lusignans of Poitou, the Roberts and Williams of Normandy, by their audacious courage mingled their blood with royal races, and sometimes a simple knight, like du Glaicquin (or du Guesclin), refused royal purple and preferred the Constable's sword.

When the Crown had secured Blois as a royal demesne, Louis XII., who took a fancy to the place, perhaps to get away from Plessis and its sinister associations, built on to the

castle, at an angle, so as to face east and west, a wing connecting the residence of the Counts of Blois with the older structure, of which nothing now remains but the immense hall where the States-General sat under Henri III. Francis I., before he fell in love with Chambord, intended to finish the castle by building on the other two sides of a square; but he abandoned Blois for Chambord, and erected only one wing, which in his time and in that of his grandsons practically constituted the castle.

This third building of Francis I.'s is much more extensive and more highly decorated than the Louvre *de Henri II.*, as it is called. It is one of the most fantastic efforts of the architecture of the Renaissance. Indeed, at a time when a more reserved style of building prevailed, and no one cared for the Middle Ages, a time when literature was not so intimately allied with art as it now is, La Fontaine wrote of the Castle of Blois in his characteristically artless language: "Looking at it from outside, the part done by order of Francis I. pleased me more than all the rest; there are a number of little windows, little balconies, little colonnades, little ornaments, not regularly ordered, which make up something great which I found very pleasing."

Thus the Castle of Blois had the attraction of representing three different kinds of architecture—three periods, three systems, three dynasties. And there is not, perhaps, any other royal residence which in this respect can compare with it. The vast building shows, in one inclosure, in one courtyard, a complete picture of that great product of national life and manners which architecture always is.

At the time when Christophe was bound for the Court, that portion of the precincts on which a fourth palace now stands —the wing added seventy years later, during his exile, by Gaston, Louis XIII.'s rebellious brother—was laid out in pastures and terraced gardens, picturesquely scattered among the foundation stones and unfinished towers begun by Francis I.

These gardens were joined by a bold flying bridge—which some old inhabitants still alive saw destroyed—to a garden on the other side of the castle, which by the slope of the ground lay on the same level. The gentlemen attached to Queen Anne of Brittany, or those who approached her with petitions from her native province, to discuss or to inform her of the state of affairs there, were wont to await her pleasure here, her *lever*, or the hour of her walking out. Hence history has handed down to us as the name of this pleasaunce *La Perchoir aux Bretons* (the Bretons' Perch); it is now an orchard belonging to some private citizen, projecting beyond the Place des Jésuites. That square also was then included in the domain of this noble residence which had its upper and its lower gardens. At some distance from the Place des Jésuites, a summer-house may still be seen, built by Catherine de' Medici, as local historians tell us, to accommodate her hot-baths. This statement enables us to trace the very irregular arrangement of the gardens which went up and down hill, following the undulations of the soil; the land about the castle is indeed very uneven, a fact which added to its strength, and, as we shall see, caused the difficulties of the Duc de Guise.

The gardens were reached by corridors and terraces; the chief corridor was known as the Galerie des Cerfs (or stags), on account of its decorations. This passage led to a magnificent staircase, which undoubtedly suggested the famous double staircase at Chambord, and which led to the apartments on each floor.

Though La Fontaine preferred the château of Francis I. to that of Louis XII., the simplicity of the *Père du Peuple* (Father of the People) may perhaps charm the genuine artist, much as he may admire the splendor of the more chivalrous king. The elegance of the two staircases which lie at the two extremities of Louis XII.'s building, the quantity of fine and original carving, of which, though time has damaged them, the remains are still the delight of antiquaries; everything, to

the almost cloister-like arrangement of the rooms, points to very simple habits. As yet the Court was evidently non-existent, or had not attained such development as Francis I. and Catherine de' Medici subsequently gave it, to the great detriment of feudal manners. As we admire the brackets, the capitals of some of the columns, and some little figures of exquisite delicacy, it is impossible not to fancy that Michel Colomb, the great sculptor, the Michael Angelo of Brittany, must have passed that way to do his Queen Anne a pleasure before immortalizing her on her father's tomb—the last Duke of Brittany.

Whatever La Fontaine may say, nothing can be more stately than the residence of Francis, the magnificent King. Thanks to I know not what coarse indifference, perhaps to utter forgetfulness, the rooms occupied by Catherine de' Medici and her son Francis II. still remain almost in their original state. The historian may reanimate them with the tragical scenes of the Reformation, of which the struggle of the Guises and the Bourbons against the House of Valois formed a complicated drama played out on this spot.

The buildings of Francis I. quite crush the simpler residence of Louis XII. by sheer mass. From the side of the lower gardens—that is to say, from the modern Place des Jésuites—the castle is twice as lofty as from the side toward the inner court. The first floor, in which are the famous corridors, is the third floor in the garden-front. Thus the second floor, where Queen Catherine resided, is in fact the fourth, and the royal apartments are on the fifth above the lower garden, which at that time was divided from the foundations by a very deep moat. Thus the castle, imposing as it is from the court, seems quite gigantic when seen from the square as La Fontaine saw it, for he owns that he never had been into the court or the rooms. From the Place des Jésuites every detail looks small. The balconies you can walk along, the colonnades of exquisite workmanship, the sculptured

windows—their recesses within, as large as small rooms, and used, in fact, at that time as boudoirs—have a general effect resembling the painted fancies of operatic scenery when the artist represents a fairy palace. But, once inside the court, the infinite delicacy of this architectural ornamentation is displayed, to the joy of the amazed spectator, though the stories above the first floor are, even there, as high as the Pavillon de l'Horloge at the Tuileries.

This part of the building, where Catherine and Mary Stewart held magnificent court, had in the middle of the facade a hexagonal hollow tower, up which winds a staircase in stone, an arabesque device invented by giants and executed by dwarfs to give this front the effect of a dream. The balustrade of the stairs rises in a spiral of rectangular panels composing the five walls of the tower, and forming at regular intervals a transverse cornice, enriched outside and in with florid carvings in stone. This bewildering creation, full of delicate and ingenious details and marvels of workmanship, by which these stones speak to us, can only be compared to the overcharged and deeply cut ivory carvings that come from China, or are made at Dieppe. In short, the stone is like lace. Flowers and figures of men and animals creep down the ribs, multiply at every step, and crown the vault with a pendant, in which the chisels of sixteenth-century sculptors have outdone the artless stone-carvers, who, fifty years before, had made the pendants for two staircases in Louis XII.'s building. Though we may be dazzled as we note these varied forms repeated with infinite prolixity, we nevertheless perceive that Francis I. lacked money for Blois, just as Louis XIV. did for Versailles. In more than one instance a graceful head looks out from a block of stone almost in the rough. More than one fanciful boss is but sketched with a few strokes of the chisel, and then abandoned to the damp, which has overgrown it with green mold. On the facade, by the side of one window carved like lace, another shows us the massive frame

eaten into by time, which has carved it after a manner of its own.

The least artistic, the least experienced eye finds here a delightful contrast between this front, rippling with marvels of design, and the inner front of Louis XII.'s castle, consisting on the first floor of arches of the airiest lightness, upheld by slender columns, resting on elegant balustrades, and two stories above with windows wrought with charming severity. Under the arches runs a gallery, of which the walls were painted in fresco; the vaulting, too, must have been painted, for some traces are still visible of that magnificence, imitated from Italian architecture—a reminiscence of our King's journeys thither when the Milanese belonged to them.

Opposite the residence of Francis I. there was at that time the chapel of the Counts of Blois, its facade almost harmonizing with the architecture of Louis XII.'s building. No figure of speech can give an adequate idea of the solid dignity of these three masses of building. In spite of the varieties of style, a certain imposing royalty, showing the extent of its fear by the magnitude of its defenses, held the three buildings together, different as they were; two of them flanking the immense hall of the States-General, as vast and lofty as a church.

And certainly neither the simplicity nor the solidity of those citizen lives which were described at the beginning of this narrative—lives in which art was always represented—was lacking to this royal residence. Blois was the fertile and brilliant example which found a living response from citizens and nobles, from money and rank, alike in the towns and in the country. You could not have wished that the home of the King who ruled Paris as it was in the sixteenth century should be other than this. The splendid raiment of the upper classes, the luxury of feminine attire, must have seemed singularly suited to the elaborate dress of these curiously wrought stones.

From floor to floor, as he mounted the wonderful stairs of his Castle of Blois, the King of France could see farther and farther over the beautiful Loire, which brought him news of all his realm, which it parts into two confronted and almost rival halves. If, instead of placing Chambord in a dead and gloomy plain two leagues away, Francis I. had built a Chambord to complete Blois on the site of the gardens, where Gaston subsequently erected his palace, Versailles would never have existed and Blois would inevitably have become the capital of France.

Four Valois' and Catherine de' Medici lavished their wealth on the Castle of Blois, but any one can guess how prodigal the sovereigns were only from seeing the thick dividing wall, the spinal column of the building, with deep alcoves cut into its substance, secret stairs and closets contrived within it, surrounding such vast rooms as the council hall, the guard-room, and the royal apartments, in which a company of infantry now finds ample quarters. Even if the visitor should fail to understand at a first glance that the marvels of the interior are worthy of those of the exterior, the remains of Catherine de' Medici's room—into which Christophe was presently admitted—are sufficient evidence of the elegant art which peopled these rooms with lively fancies, with salamanders sparkling among flowers, with all the most brilliant hues of the palette of the sixteenth century decorating the darkest staircase. In that room the observer may still see the traces of that love of gilding which Catherine had brought from Italy, for the princesses of her country loved (as the author above quoted delightfully expresses it) to overlay the castles of France with the gold gained in trade by their ancestors, and to stamp the walls of royal rooms with the sign of their wealth.

The Queen-mother occupied the rooms on the first floor that had formerly been those of Queen Claude de France, Francis I.'s wife ; and the delicate sculpture is still to be seen

of double C's, with a device in pure white of swans and lilies, signifying *Candidior candidis* (the whitest of the white), the badge of that Queen whose name, like Catherine's, began with C, and equally appropriate to Louis XII.'s daughter and to the mother of the Valois; for notwithstanding the violence of Calvinist slander, no doubt was ever thrown on Catherine de' Medici's enduring fidelity to Henri II.

The Queen-mother, with two young children still on her hands—a boy, afterward the Duc d'Alençon, and Marguerite, who became the wife of Henri IV., and whom Charles IX. called Margot—needed the whole of this second floor.

King Francis II. and his Queen, Mary Stewart, had the royal apartments on the third floor that Francis I. had occupied, and which were also those of Henri III. The royal apartments and those of the Queen-mother are divided from end to end of the castle into two parts by the famous party wall, four feet thick, which supports the thrust of the immensely thick walls of the rooms. Thus on the lower as well as on the upper floors the rooms are in two distinct suites. That half which, facing to the south, is lighted from the court, held the rooms for state receptions and public business; while, to escape the heat, the private rooms had a north aspect, where there is a splendid frontage with arcades and balconies, and a view over the country of the Vendômois, the *Perchoir aux Bretons*, and the moats of the town—the only town mentioned by the great fable writer, the admirable La Fontaine.

Francis I.'s castle at that time ended at an enormous tower, only begun, but intended to mark the vast angle the palace would have formed in turning a flank; Gaston subsequently demolished part of its walls to attach his palace to the tower; but he never finished the work, and the tower remains a ruin. This royal keep was used as a prison, or, according to popular tradition, as *oubliettes* (dungeon cells). What poet could not feel deep regret or weep for France as he wanders now through

the hall of this magnificent castle, and sees the exquisite arabesques of Catherine de' Medici's room, whitewashed and almost smothered by order of the governor of the barracks at the time of the cholera—for this royal residence is now a barrack.

The paneling of Catherine de' Medici's closet, of which more particular mention will presently be made, is the last relic of the rich furnishing collected by five artistic kings.

As we make our way through this labyrinth of rooms, halls, staircases, and turrets, we can say with horrible certainty, "Here Mary Stewart cajoled her husband in favor of the Guises. There those Guises insulted Catherine. Later, on this very spot, the younger *Balafré* * fell under the swords of the avengers of the Crown. A century earlier Louis XII. signaled from that window to invite the advance of his friend the Cardinal d'Amboise. From this balcony, d'Épernon, Ravaillac's accomplice, welcomed Queen Marie de' Medici, who, it is said, knew of the intended regicide and left things to take their course!"

In the chapel where Henry IV. and Marguerite de Valois were betrothed—the last remnant of the old castle of the Counts of Blois—the regimental boots are made. This wonderful structure, where so many styles are combined, where such great events have been accomplished, is in a state of ruin which is a disgrace to France. How grievous it is to those who love the memorial buildings of old France to feel that ere long these eloquent stones will have gone the way of the house at the corner of the Rue de la Vieille-Pelleterie: they will survive, perhaps, only in these pages.

It is necessary to observe that, in order to keep a keener eye on the Court, the Guises, though they had a mansion in the town, which is still to be seen, had obtained permission to reside above the rooms of Louis XII. in the apartments

* The gashed or scarred.

since used by the Duchesse de Nemours, in the upper story on the second floor.

Francis II. and his young Queen, Mary Stewart, in love like two children of sixteen, as they were, had been suddenly transferred, one cold winter's day, from Saint-Germain, which the Duc de Guise thought too open to surprise, to the stronghold, as it then was, of Blois, isolated on three sides by precipitous slopes, while its gates were strictly guarded. The Guises, the Queen's uncles, had the strongest reasons for not living in Paris, and for detaining the Court in a place which could be easily guarded and defended.

A struggle for the throne was being carried on, which was not ended until twenty-eight years later, in 1588, when, in this same Castle of Blois, Henri III., bitterly humiliated by the House of Lorraine, under his mother's very eyes, planned the death of the boldest of the Guises, the second Balafré (or scarred), son of the first Balafré, by whom Catherine de' Medici was tricked, imprisoned, spied on, and threatened.

Indeed, the fine Castle of Blois was to Catherine the strictest prison. On the death of her husband, who had always kept her in leading-strings, she had hoped to rule; but, on the contrary, she found herself a slave to strangers, whose politeness was infinitely more cruel than the brutality of gaolers. She could do nothing that was not known. Those of her ladies who were attached to her either had lovers devoted to the Guises, or Argus eyes watching over them. Indeed, at that time the conflict of passions had the capricious vagaries which they always derive from the powerful antagonism of two hostile interests in the State. Love-making, which served Catherine well, was also an instrument in the hands of the Guises. Thus the Prince de Condé, the leader of the Reformed party, was attached to the Maréchale de Saint-André, whose husband was the Grand Master's tool. The cardinal, who had learned from the affair of the Vidame de Chartres that Catherine was unconquered rather than unconquerable, was paying court to

her. Thus the play of passions brought strange complications into that of politics, making a double game of chess, as it were, in which it was necessary to read both the heart and brain of a man, and to judge, on occasion, whether one would not belie the other.

Though she lived constantly under the eye of the Cardinal de Lorraine or of his brother, the Duc François de Guise, who both distrusted her, Catherine's most immediate and shrewdest enemy was her daughter-in-law, Queen Mary, a little, fair girl as mischievous as a waiting-maid, as proud as a Stewart might be who wore three crowns, as learned as an ancient scholar, as tricky as a schoolgirl, as much in love with her husband as a courtesan of her lover, devoted to her uncles, whom she admired, and delighted to find that King Francis, by her persuasion, shared her high opinion of them. A mother-in-law is always a person disliked by her daughter-in-law, especially when she has won the crown and would like to keep it—as Catherine had imprudently too plainly shown. Her former position, when Diane de Poitiers ruled King Henri II., had been more endurable; at least she had enjoyed the homage due to a Queen and the respect of the Court; whereas, now, the Duke and the cardinal, having none about them but their own creatures, seemed to take pleasure in humiliating her. Catherine, a prisoner among courtiers, was the object, not every day, but every hour, of blows offensive to her dignity; for the Guises persisted in carrying on the same system as the late King had employed to thwart her.

The six-and-thirty years of disaster which devastated France may be said to have begun with the scene in which the most perilous part had been allotted to the son of the Queen's furrier—a part which makes him the leading figure in this narrative. The danger into which this zealous reformer was falling became evident in the course of the morning when he set out from the river-port of Beaugency, carrying precious documents which compromised the loftiest heads of the

nobility, and embarked for Blois in company with a crafty partisan, the indefatigable la Renaudie, who had arrived on the quay before him.

While the barque conveying Christophe was being wafted down the Loire before a light easterly breeze, the famous Cardinal de Lorraine and the second Duc de Guise, one of the greatest war captains of the time, were considering their position, like two eagles on a rocky peak, and looking cautiously round before striking the first great blow by which they tried to kill the Reformation in France. This was to be struck at Amboise, and it was repeated in Paris twelve years later, on the 24th August, 1572.

In the course of the previous night, three gentlemen, who played an important part in the twelve years' drama that arose from this double plot laid by the Guises on one hand and the Reformers on the other, had arrived at the castle at a furious gallop, leaving their horses half-dead at the postern gate, held by captains and men who were wholly devoted to the Duc de Guise, the idol of the soldiery.

A word must be said as to this great man, and first of all a word to explain his present position.

His mother was Antoinette de Bourbon, great-aunt of Henri IV. But, of what account are alliances? At this moment he aimed at nothing less than his cousin de Condé's head. Mary Stewart was his niece. His wife was Anne, daughter of the Duke of Ferrara. The Grand Connétable Anne de Montmorency addressed the Duc de Guise as "Monseigneur," as he wrote to the King, and signed himself "Your very humble servant." Guise, the Grand Master of the King's household, wrote in reply, "Monsieur le Connétable," and signed, as in writing to the Parlement, "Your faithful friend."

As for the cardinal, nicknamed the Trans-Alpine Pope, and spoken of by Estienne as "His Holiness," the whole monastic church of France was on his side, and he treated with the Pope as his equal. He was vain of his eloquence, and one

of the ablest theologians of his time, while he kept watch over France and Italy by the instrumentality of three religious Orders entirely devoted to him, who were on foot for him day and night, serving him as spies and reporters.

These few words are enough to show to what a height of power the cardinal and the Duke had risen. In spite of their wealth and the revenues of their offices, they were so entirely disinterested, or so much carried away by the tide of politics, and so generous too, that both were in debt—no doubt after the manner of Cæsar. Hence, when Henri III. had seen his threatening foe murdered, the second Balafré, the House of Guise was inevitably ruined. Their vast outlay for above a century, in hope of seizing the Crown, accounts for the decay of this great House under Louis XIII. and Louis XIV., when the sudden end of MADAME revealed to all Europe how low a Chevalier de Lorraine had fallen.

So the cardinal and the Duke, proclaiming themselves the heirs of the deposed Carlovingian kings, behaved very insolently to Catherine de' Medici, their niece's mother-in-law. The Duchesse de Guise spared Catherine no mortification; she was an Este, and Catherine de' Medici was the daughter of self-made Florentine merchants, whom the sovereigns of Europe had not yet admitted to their royal fraternity. Francis I. had regarded his son's marriage with a Medici as a mésalliance, and had only allowed it in the belief that this son would never be the Dauphin. Hence his fury when the Dauphin died, poisoned by the Florentine Montecuculi.

The Estes refused to recognize the Medici as Italian princes. These time-honored merchants were, in fact, struggling with the impossible problem of maintaining a throne in the midst of republican institutions. The title of Grand Duke was not bestowed on the Medici till much later by Philip II., King of Spain; and they earned it by treason to France, their benefactress, and by a servile attachment to the Court of Spain, which was covertly thwarting them in Italy.

"Flatter none but your enemies!" This great axiom, uttered by Catherine, would seem to have ruled all the policy of this merchant race, which never lacked great men till its destinies had grown great, and which broke down a little too soon under the degeneracy which is always the end of royal dynasties and great families.

For three generations there was a prelate and a warrior of the House of Lorraine; but, which is perhaps not less remarkable, the churchman had always shown—as did the present cardinal—a singular likeness to Cardinal Ximenes, whom the Cardinal de Richelieu also resembled. These five prelates all had faces that were at once mean and terrifying; while the warrior's face was of that Basque and mountain type which reappears in the features of Henri IV. In both the father and the son it was seamed by a scar, which did not destroy the grace and affability that bewitched their soldiers as much as their bravery.

The way and the occasion of the Grand Master's being wounded is not without interest here, for it was healed by the daring of one of the personages of this drama, Ambroise Paré, who was under obligation to the Syndic of the furriers. At the siege of Calais the Duke's head was pierced by a lance which, entering below the right eye, went through to the neck below the left ear; the end broke off and remained in the wound. The Duke was lying in his tent in the midst of the general woe, and would have died but for the bold promptitude and devotion of Ambroise Paré.

"The Duke is not dead, gentlemen," said Paré, turning to the bystanders, who were dissolved in tears. "But he soon will be," he added, "unless I treat him as if he were, and I will try it at the risk of the worst that can befall me—— You see!"

He set his left foot on the Duke's breast, took the stump of the lance with his nails, loosened it by degrees, and at last drew the spear-head out of the wound, as if it had been from

some senseless object instead of a man's head. Though he cured the Prince he had handled so boldly, he could not hinder him from bearing to his grave the terrible scar from which he had his name. His son also had the same nickname for a similar reason.

Having gained entire mastery over the King, who was ruled by his wife, as a result of the passionate and mutual affection which the Guises knew how to turn to account, the two great Princes of Lorraine reigned over France, and had not an enemy at Court but Catherine de' Medici. And no great politician ever played a closer game. The respective attitudes of Henry II.'s ambitious widow, and of the no less ambitious House of Lorraine, was symbolized, as it were, by the positions they held on the terrace of the castle on the very morning when Christophe was about to arrive there. The Queen-mother, feigning extreme affection for the Guises, had asked to be informed as to the news brought by the three gentlemen who had arrived from different parts of the kingdom; but she had been mortified by a polite dismissal from the cardinal. She was walking at the farther end of the pleasaunce above the Loire, where she was having an observatory erected for her astrologer, Ruggieri; the building may still be seen, and from it a wide view is to be had over the beautiful valley. The two Guises were on the opposite side overlooking the Vendômois, the upper part of the town, the Perchoir aux Bretons, and the postern gate of the castle.

Catherine had deceived the brothers, tricking them by an assumption of dissatisfaction; for she was really very glad to be able to speak with one of the gentlemen who had come in hot haste, and who was in her secret confidence; who boldly played a double game, but who was, to be sure, well paid for it. This gentleman was Chiverni, who affected to be the mere tool of the Cardinal de Lorraine, but who was in reality in Catherine's service. Catherine had two other devoted allies in the two Gondis, creatures of her own; but

they, as Florentines, were too open to the suspicion of the Guises to be sent into the country; she kept them at the Court, where their every word and action was closely watched, but where they, on their side, watched the Guises and reported to Catherine. These two Italians kept a third adherent to the Queen-mother's faction, Birague, a clever Piedmontese, who, like Chiverni, pretended to have abandoned Catherine to attach himself to the Guises, and who encouraged them in their undertakings while spying for Catherine.

Chiverni had arrived from Écouen and Paris. The last to ride in was Saint-André, Marshal of France, who rose to be such an important personage that the Guises adopted him as the third of the triumvirate they formed against Catherine in the following year. But earlier than either of these, Vieilleville, the builder of the Castle of Duretal, who had also by his devotion to the Guises earned the rank of marshal, had secretly come and more secretly gone, without any one knowing what the mission might be that the Grand Master had given him. Saint-André, it was known, had been instructed to take military measures to entice all the reformers who were under arms to Amboise, as the result of a council held by the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Duc de Guise, Birague, Chiverni, Vieilleville, and Saint-André. As the heads of the House of Lorraine thus employed Birague, it is to be supposed that they trusted to their strength, for they knew that he was attached to the Queen-mother; but it is possible that they kept him about them with a view to discovering their rival's secret designs, as she allowed him to attend them. In those strange times the double part played by some political intriguers was known to both the parties who employed them; they were like cards in the hands of players, and the craftiest won the game.

All through this sitting the brothers had been impenetrably guarded. Catherine's conversation with her friends will, however, fully explain the purpose of this meeting, convened by

the Guises in the open air, at break of day, in the terraced garden, as though every one feared to speak within the walls full of ears of the Castle of Blois.

The Queen-mother, who had been walking about all the morning with the two Gondi, under pretense of examining the observatory that was being built, but, in fact, anxiously watching the hostile party, was presently joined by Chiverni. She was standing at the angle of the terrace opposite the church of Saint-Nicholas, and there feared no listeners. The wall is as high as the church-towers, and the Guises always held council at the other corner of the terrace, below the dungeon then begun, walking to and from the Perchoir des Bretons and the arcade by the bridge which joined the gardens to the Perchoir. There was nobody at the bottom of the ravine.

Chiverni took the Queen's hand to kiss it, and slipped into her fingers a tiny letter without being seen by the Italians. Catherine quickly turned away, walked to the corner of the parapet, and read as follows:

"You are powerful enough to keep the balance true between the great ones, and to make them contend as to which shall serve you best; you have your house full of kings, and need not fear either Lorrains or Bourbons so long as you set them against each other; for both sides aim at snatching the crown from your children. Be your advisers' mistress, and not their slave; keep up each side by the other; otherwise the kingdom will go from bad to worse and great wars may ensue.

"L'Hôpital."

The Queen placed this letter in the bosom of her stomacher, reminding herself to burn it as soon as she should be alone.

"When did you see him?" she asked Chiverni.

"On returning from seeing the Connétable at Melum; he was going through with the Duchesse de Berri, whom he was most anxious to convey in safety to Savoy, so as to return

here and enlighten the Chancellor Olivier, who is, in fact, the dupe of the Lorrains. Monsieur de l'Hôpital is resolved to adhere to your cause, seeing the aims that the Messieurs de Guise have in view. And he will hasten back as fast as possible to give you his vote in the council."

"Is he sincere?" said Catherine. "For you know that when the Lorrains admitted him to the council, it was to enable them to rule."

"L'Hôpital is a Frenchman of too good a stock not to be honest," said Chiverni; "beside, that letter is a sufficient pledge."

"And what answer does the Connétable send to these gentlemen?"

"He says the King is his master, and he awaits his orders. On this reply, the cardinal, to prevent any resistance, will propose to appoint his brother lieutenant-general of the realm."

"So soon!" exclaimed Catherine in dismay. "Well, and did Monsieur de l'Hôpital give you any further message for me?"

"He told me, madame, that you alone can stand between the throne and Messieurs de Guise."

"But does he suppose that I will use the Huguenots as a means of defense?"

"Oh, madame," cried Chiverni, surprised by her perspicacity, "we never thought of placing you in such a difficult position."

"Did he know what a position I am in?" asked the Queen calmly.

"Pretty nearly. He thinks you made a dupe's bargain when, on the death of the late King, you accepted for your share the fragments saved from the ruin of Madame Diane. The Messieurs de Guise thought they had paid their debt to the Queen by gratifying the woman."

"Yes," said Catherine, looking at the two Gondis, "I made a great mistake there."

"A mistake the gods might make!" replied Charles de Gondi.

"Gentlemen," said the Queen, "if I openly take up the cause of the Reformers, I shall be the slave of a party."

"Madame," said Chiverni eagerly, "I entirely agree with you. You must make use of them, but not let them make use of you."

"Although, for the moment, your strength lies there," said Charles de Gondi, "we must not deceive ourselves; success and failure are equally dangerous!"

"I know it," said the Queen. "One false move will be a pretext eagerly seized by the Guises to sweep me off the board!"

"A Pope's niece, the mother of four Valois, the Queen of France, the widow of the most ardent persecutor of the Huguenots, an Italian and a Catholic, the aunt of Leo X.—can you form an alliance with the Reformation?" asked Charles de Gondi.

"On the other hand," Albert replied, "is not seconding the Guises consenting to usurpation? You have to deal with a race that looks to the struggle between the church and the Reformation to give them a crown for the taking. You may avail yourself of Huguenot help without abjuring the faith."

"Remember, madame, that your family, which ought to be wholly devoted to the King of France, is at this moment in the service of the King of Spain," said Chiverni. "And it would go over to the Reformation to-morrow if the Reformation could make the Duke of Florence King!"

"I am very well inclined to give the Huguenots a helping hand for a time," said Catherine, "were it only to be revenged on that soldier, that priest, and that woman!"

And with an Italian glance, her eye turned on the Duke and the cardinal, and then to the upper rooms of the castle where her son lived and Mary Stewart. "Those three snatched the reins of government from my hands," she went on, "when I

had waited for them long enough while that old woman held them in my place."

She jerked her head in the direction of Chenonceaux, the castle she had just exchanged for Chaumont with Diane de Poitiers. "*Ma*," she said in Italian, "it would seem that these gentry of the Geneva bands have not wit enough to apply to me! On my honor, I cannot go to meet them! And not one of you would dare to carry them a message." She stamped her foot. "I hoped you might have met the hunchback at Écouen," she said to Chiverni. "He has brains."

"He was there, madame," replied Chiverni, "but he could not induce the Connétable to join him. Monsieur de Montmorency would be glad enough to overthrow the Guises, who obtained his dismissal; but he will have nothing to do with heresy."

"And who, gentlemen, is to crush these private whims that are an offense to royalty? By heaven! these nobles must be made to destroy each other—as Louis XI. made them, the greatest of your kings. In this kingdom there are four or five parties and my son's is the weakest of them all."

"The Reformation is an idea," remarked Charles de Gondi, "and the parties crushed by Louis XI. were based only on interest."

"There is always an idea to back up interest," replied Chiverni. "In Louis XI.'s time the idea was called the Great Fief!"

"Use heresy as an axe," said Albert de Gondi. "You will not incur the odium of executions."

"Ha!" said the Queen, "but I know nothing of the strength or the schemes of these folk, and I cannot communicate with them through any safe channel. If I were found out in any such conspiracy, either by the Queen, who watches me as if I were an infant in arms, or by my two gaolers, who

let no one come into the castle, I should then be banished the country, and taken back to Florence under a formidable escort captained by some ruffianly Guisard! Thank you, friends! Oh, daughter-in-law! I hope you may some day be a prisoner in your own house; then you will know what you have inflicted on me!"

"Their schemes!" exclaimed Chiverni. "The Grand Master and the cardinal know them; but those two foxes will not tell. If you, madame, can make them tell, I will devote myself to you, and come to an understanding with the Prince de Condé."

"Which of their plans have they failed to conceal from you?" asked the Queen, glancing toward the brothers de Guise.

"Monsieur de Vieilleville and Monsieur de Saint-André have just had their orders, of which we know nothing; but the Grand Master is concentrating his best troops on the left bank, it would seem. Within a few days you will find yourself at Amboise. The Grand Master came to this terrace to study the position, and he does not think Blois favorable to his private schemes. Well, then, what does he want?" said Chiverni, indicating the steep cliffs that surround the castle. "The Court could nowhere be safer from sudden attack than it is here."

"Abdicate or govern," said Albert de Gondi in the Queen's ear as she stood thinking.

A fearful expression of suppressed rage flashed across the Queen's handsome ivory-pale face. She was not yet forty, and she had lived for twenty-six years in the French Court, absolutely powerless, she who, ever since she had come there, had longed to play the leading part.

"Never so long as this son lives! His wife has bewitched him!"

After a short pause these terrible words broke from her in the language of Dante.

Catherine's exclamation had its inspiration in a strange prediction, spoken a few days before at the Castle of Chaumont, on the opposite bank of the Loire, whither she had gone with her astrologer Ruggieri to consult a famous soothsayer. This woman was brought to meet her by Nostradamus, the chief of those physicians who in that great sixteenth century believed in the occult sciences, with Ruggieri, Cardan, Paracelsus, and many more. This fortune-teller, of whose life history has no record, had fixed the reign of Francis II. at one year's duration.

"And what is your opinion of all this?" Catherine asked Chiverni.

"There will be fighting," said the cautious gentleman. "The King of Navarre——"

"Oh! say the Queen!" Catherine put in.

"Very true, the Queen," said Chiverni, smiling, "has made the Prince de Condé the chief of the Reformed party; he, as a younger son, may dare much; and Monsieur le Cardinal talks of sending for him to come here."

"If only he comes!" cried the Queen, "I am saved!"

So it will be seen that the leaders of the great Reforming movement had been right in thinking of Catherine as an ally.

"This is the jest of it," said the Queen; "the Bourbons are tricking the Huguenots, and Master Calvin, de Bèze, and the rest are cheating the Bourbons; but shall we be strong enough to take in the Huguenots, the Bourbons, and the Guises? In front of three such foes we are justified in feeling our pulse," said she.

"They have not the King," replied Albert. "You must always win, having the King on your side."

"Malediction, Mary!" said Catherine, between her teeth.

"The Guises are already thinking of diverting the affections of the middle-class," said Birague.

The hope of snatching the Crown had not been premedi-

tated by the two heads of the refractory House of Guise; there was nothing to justify the project or the hope; circumstances suggested such audacity. The two cardinals and the two Balafrés were, as it happened, four ambitious men, superior in political gifts to any of the men about them. Indeed, the family was only subdued at last by Henri IV., himself a leader of faction, brought up in the great school of which Catherine and the Guises were the teachers—and he had profited by their lessons.

At this time these two brothers were the arbiters of the greatest revolution attempted in Europe since that carried through in England under Henry VIII., which had resulted from the invention of printing. They were the enemies of the Reformation, the power was in their hands, and they meant to stamp out heresy; but Calvin, their opponent, though less famous than Luther, was a stronger man. Calvin saw government where Luther had only seen dogma. Where the burly, beer-drinking, uxorious German fought with the devil, flinging his inkstand at the fiend, the man of Picardy, frail and unmarried, dreamed of plans of campaign, of directing battles, of arming princes, and of raising whole nations by disseminating republican doctrines in the hearts of the middle-classes, so as to make up, by increased progress in the spirit of nations, for his constant defeats on the battlefield.

The Cardinal de Lorraine and the Duc de Guise knew quite as well as Philip II. and the Duke of Alva where the Monarchy was aimed at, and how close the connection was between Catholicism and sovereignty. Charles V., intoxicated with having drunk too deeply of Charlemagne's cup, and trusting too much in the strength of his rule, for he believed that he and Soliman might divide the world between them, was not at first conscious that his front was attacked; as soon as Cardinal Granvelle showed him the extent of the festering sore, he abdicated.

The Guises had a startling conception: they would extin-

guish heresy with a single blow. They tried to strike that blow for the first time at Amboise, and they made a second attempt on Saint-Bartholomew's Day; this time they were in accord with Catherine de' Medici, enlightened as she was by the flames of twelve years' wars, and yet more by the ominous word "Republic" spoken and even published at a later date by the writers of the Reformation, whose ideas Lecamus, the typical citizen of Paris, had already understood. The two Princes, on the eve of striking a fatal blow to the heart of the nobility, in order to cut it off from the first from a religious party whose triumph would be its ruin, were now discussing the means of announcing their stroke of policy to the King, while Catherine was conversing with her four counselors.

"Jeanne d'Albret knew what she was doing when she proclaimed herself the protectress of the Huguenots! She has in the Reformation a battering-ram which she makes good play with!" said the Grand Master, who had measured the depth of the Queen of Navarre's scheming.

Jeanne d'Albret was, in point of fact, one of the cleverest personages of her time.

"Théodore de Bèze is at Nérac, having taken Calvin's orders."

"What men those common folk can lay their hands on!" cried the Duke.

"Ay, we have not a man on our side to match that fellow la Renaudie," said the cardinal. "He is a perfect Catiline."

"Men like him always act on their own account," replied the Duke. "Did not I see la Renaudie's value? I loaded him with favors, I helped him to get away when he was condemned by the Bourgogne Parlement, I got him back into France by obtaining a revision of his trial, and I intended to do all I could for him, while he was plotting a diabolical conspiracy against us. The rascal has effected an alliance between the German Protestants and the heretics in France by smoothing over the discrepancies of dogma between Luther and

Calvin. He has won over the disaffected nobles to the cause of the Reformation without asking them to abjure Catholicism. So long ago as last year he had thirty commanders on his side! He was everywhere at once: at Lyons, in Languedoc, at Nantes. Finally, he drew up the articles settled in Council and, distributed throughout Germany, in which theologians declare that it is justifiable to use force to get the King out of our hands, and this is being disseminated in every town. Look for him where you will, you will nowhere find him!

"Hitherto I have shown him nothing but kindness! We shall have to kill him like a dog, or to make a bridge of gold for him to cross and come into our house."

"Brittany and Languedoc, the whole kingdom, indeed, is being worked upon to give us a deadly shock," said the cardinal. "After yesterday's festival, I spent the rest of the night in reading all the information sent me by my priesthood; but no one is involved but some impoverished gentlemen and artisans, people who may be either hanged or left alive, it matters not which. The Colignys and the Condés are not yet visible, though they hold the threads of the conspiracy."

"Ay," said the Duke; "and as soon as that lawyer Avenelles had let the cat out of the bag, I told Braguelonne to give the conspirators their head: they have no suspicions, they think they can surprise us, and then perhaps the leaders will show themselves. My advice would be that we should allow ourselves to be beaten for forty-eight hours——"

"That would be half-an-hour too long," said the cardinal in alarm.

"How brave you are!" retorted le Balafré.

The cardinal went on with calm indifference—

"Whether the Prince de Condé be implicated or not, if we are assured that he is the leader, cut off his head. What we want for that business is judges rather than soldiers, and there will never be any lack of judges! Victory in the

Supreme Court is always more certain than on the field of battle, and costs less."

"I am quite willing," replied the Duke. "But do you believe that the Prince de Condé is powerful enough to inspire such audacity in those who are sent on first to attack us? Is there not——?"

"The King of Navarre,"* said the cardinal.

"A gaby who bows low in my presence," replied the Duke. "That Florentine woman's graces must have blinded you, I think——"

"Oh, I have thought of that already," said the prelate. "If I aim at a gallant intimacy with her, is it not that I may read to the bottom of her heart?"

"She has no heart," said his brother sharply. "She is even more ambitious than we are."

"You are a brave commander," said the cardinal; "but, take my word for it, our skirts are very near touching, and I made Mary Stewart watch her narrowly before you even suspected her. Catherine has no more religion in her than my shoe. If she is not the soul of the conspiracy, it is not for lack of good-will; but we will draw her out and see how far she will support us. Till now I know for certain that she has not held any communication with the heretics."

"It is time that we should lay everything before the King, and the Queen-mother, who knows nothing," said the Duke, "and that is the only proof of her innocence. La Renaudie will understand from my arrangements that we are warned. Last night Nemours must have been following up the detachments of the Reformed party, who were coming in by the cross-roads, and the conspirators will be compelled to attack us at Amboise; I will let them all in. Here," and he pointed to the three steep slopes of rock on which the Château de Blois is built, just as Chiverni had done a moment since, "we should have a fight with no result; the Huguenots could

* Husband of Queen Margaret.

come and go at will. Blois is a hall with four doors, while Amboise is a sack."

"I will not leave the Florentine Queen," said the cardinal.

"We have made one mistake," remarked the Duke, playing with his dagger, tossing it in the air, and catching it again by the handle; "we ought to have behaved to her as to the Reformers, giving her liberty to move, so as to take her in the act."

The cardinal looked at his brother for a minute, shaking his head.

"What does Pardaillan want?" the Duke exclaimed, seeing this young gentleman coming along the terrace. Pardaillan was to become famous for his fight with la Renaudie, in which both were killed.

"Monseigneur, a youth sent here by the Queen's furrier is at the gate and says that he has a set of ermine to deliver to her majesty. Is he to be admitted?"

"To be sure; an ermine surcoat she spoke of but yesterday," said the cardinal. "Let the store-clerk in. She will need the mantle for her journey by the Loire."

"Which way did he come, that he was not stopped before reaching the gate?" asked the Grand Master.

"I do not know," said Pardaillan.

"I will go to see him in the Queen's room," said le Balafré. "Tell him to await her *lever* in the guardroom. But, Pardaillan, is he young?"

"Yes, monseigneur; he says he is Lecamus' son."

"Lecamus is a good Catholic," said the cardinal, who, like the Duke, was gifted with a memory like Cæsar's. "The priest of Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs trusts him, for he is officer of the peace for the Palace."

"Make this youth chat with the captain of the Scotch Guard, all the same," said the Grand Master, with an emphasis which gave the words a very pointed meaning. "But Ambroise is at the castle; through him we shall know

"WE HAVE MADE ONE MISTAKE," REMARKED THE DUKE, PLAYING WITH HIS DAGGER.

at once if he really is the son of Lecamus, who was formerly his very good friend. Ask for Ambroise Paré."

At this moment the Queen came toward the brothers, who hurried to meet her with marks of respect, in which Catherine never failed to discern deep irony.

"Gentlemen," said she, "will you condescend to inform me of what is going on? Is the widow of your late sovereign of less account in your esteem than Messieurs de Vieilleville, Birague, and Chiverni?"

"Madame," said the cardinal, with an air of gallantry, "our first duty as men, before all matters of politics, is not to alarm ladies by false rumors. This morning, indeed, we have had occasion to confer on State affairs. You will pardon my brother for having in the first instance given orders on purely military matters which must be indifferent to you—the really important points remain to be discussed. If you approve, we will all attend the *lever* of the King and Queen; it is close on the hour."

"Why, what is happening, Monsieur le Grand Maître?" asked Catherine, affecting terror.

"The Reformation, madame, is no longer a mere heresy; it is a party which is about to take up arms and seize the King."

Catherine, with the cardinal, the Duke, and the gentlemen, made their way toward the staircase by the corridor, which was crowded with courtiers who had not the right of admission, and who ranged themselves against the wall.

Gondi, who had been studying the Princes of Lorraine while Catherine was conversing with them, said in good Tuscan and in Catherine's ear these two words, which became by-words, and which express one aspect of that royally powerful nature—

"*Odiate e aspettate!*" (Hate and wait.)

Pardaillan, who had delivered to the officer on guard at the gatehouse the order to admit the messenger from the Queen's

furrier, found Christophe standing outside the portico and staring at the facade built by good King Louis XII., whereon there was at that time an even more numerous array of sculptured figures of the coarsest buffoonery—if we may judge by what has survived. The curious will detect, for instance, a figure of a woman carved on the capital of one of the columns of the gateway holding up her skirts, and saucily exhibiting "what Brunel displayed to Marphise" to a burly monk crouching in the capital of the corresponding column at the other jamb of this gate, above which once stood a statue of Louis XII. Several of the windows of this front, ornamented in this grotesque taste, and now unfortunately destroyed, amused, or seemed to amuse, Christophe, whom the gunners of the Guard were already pelting with their pleasantries.

"He would like to be lodged there, he would," said the sergeant-at-arms, patting his store of charges for his musket, which hung from his belt in the sugar-loaf-shaped cartridges.

"Halloo, you from Paris, you never saw so much before!" said a soldier.

"He recognizes good King Louis!" said another.

Christophe affected not to hear them, and tried to look even more helplessly amazed, so that his look of blank stupidity was an excellent recommendation to Pardaillan.

"The Queen is not yet risen," said the young officer. "Come and wait in the guardroom."

Christophe slowly followed Pardaillan. He purposely lingered to admire the pretty covered balcony with an arched front, where, in the reign of Louis XII., the courtiers could wait under cover till the hour of reception if the weather was bad, and where at this moment some of the gentlemen attached to the Guises were grouped; for the staircase, still so well preserved, which led to their apartments is at the end of that gallery, in a tower of which the architecture is greatly admired by the curious.

"Now, then! have you come here to study graven images?"

cried Pardaillan, seeing Lecamus riveted in front of the elegant stonework of the outer parapet which unites—or, if you will, separates—the columns of each archway.

Christophe followed the young captain to the grand staircase, not without glancing at this almost Moorish-looking structure from top to bottom with an expression of ecstasy. On this fine morning the court was full of captains-at-arms and of courtiers chatting in groups; and their brilliant costumes gave life to the scene, in itself so bright, for the marvels of the noble architecture that decorated the facade were still quite new.

"Come in here," said Pardaillan to Lecamus, signing to him to follow him through the carved door on the second floor, which was thrown open by a sentry on his recognizing Pardaillan.

Christophe's amazement may easily be imagined on entering this guardroom, so vast that the military genius of our day has cut it across by a partition to form two rooms. It extends, in fact, both on the third floor, where the King lived, and on the second, occupied by the Queen-mother, for a third of the length of the front toward the court, and is lighted by two windows to the left and two to the right of the famous staircase. The young captain made his way toward the door leading to the King's room, which opened out of this hall, and desired one of the pages-in-waiting to tell Madame Dayelle, one of the Queen's ladies, that the furrier was in the guardroom with her surcoats.

At a sign from Pardaillan, Christophe went to stand by the side of an officer seated on a low stool in the corner of a chimney-place as large as his father's shop, at one end of this vast hall opposite another exactly like it at the other end. In talking with this gentleman, Christophe succeeded in interesting him by telling him the trivial details of his trade; and he seemed so completely the craftsman that the officer volunteered this opinion to the captain of the Scotch Guard, who

came in to cross-question the lad while scrutinizing him closely out of the corner of his eye.

Though Christophe Lecamus had had ample warning, he still did not understand the cold ferocity of the interested parties between whom Chaudieu had bid him stand. To an observer who should have mastered the secrets of the drama, as the historian knows them now, it would have seemed terrible to see this young fellow, the hope of two families, risking his life between two such powerful and pitiless machines as Catherine and the Guises. But how few brave hearts ever know the extent of their danger! From the way in which the quays of the city and the château were guarded, Christophe had expected to find snares and spies at every step, so he determined to conceal the importance of his errand and the agitation of his mind under the stupid tradesman's stare, which he had put on before Pardaillan, the officer of the Guard, and the captain.

The stir which in a royal residence attends the rising of the King began to be perceptible. The nobles, leaving their horses with their pages or grooms in the outer court, for no one but the King and the Queen was allowed to enter the inner court on horseback, were mounting the splendid stairs in twos and threes and filling the guardroom, a large room with two fireplaces—where the huge mantels are now bereft of adornment, where squalid red tiles have taken the place of the fine mosaic flooring, where royal hangings covered the rough walls now daubed with whitewash, and where every art of an age unique in its splendor was displayed at its best.

Catholics and Protestants poured in as much to hear the news and study each other's faces as to pay their court to the King. His passionate affection for Mary Stewart, which neither the Queen-mother nor the Guises attempted to check, and Mary's politic submissiveness in yielding to it, deprived the King of all power; indeed, though he was now seventeen, he knew nothing of royalty but its indulgences, and of mar-

riage nothing but the raptures of first love. In point of fact, everybody tried to ingratiate himself with Queen Mary and her uncles, the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Grand Master of the household.

All this bustle went on under the eyes of Christophe, who watched each fresh arrival with very natural excitement. A magnificent curtain, on each side of it a page and a yeoman of the Scotch Guard, then on duty, showed him the entrance to that royal chamber, destined to be fatal to the son of the Grand Master, for the younger Balafré fell dead at the foot of the bed now occupied by Mary Stewart and Francis II. The Queen's ladies occupied the chimney-place opposite to that where Christophe was still chatting with the captain of the Guard. This fireplace, by its position, was the seat of honor, for it is built into the thick wall of the council-room, between the door into the royal chamber and that into the council-room, so that the ladies and gentlemen who had a right to sit there were close to where the King and the Queen must pass. The courtiers were certain to see Catherine; for her maids of honor, in mourning, like the rest of the Court, came up from her rooms conducted by the Countess Fieschi, and took their place on the side next the council-room, facing those of the young Queen, who, led by the Duchesse de Guise, took the opposite angle next the royal bedchamber.

Between the courtiers and these young ladies, all belonging to the first families in the kingdom, a space was kept of some few paces, which none but the greatest nobles were permitted to cross. The Countess Fieschi and the Duchesse de Guise were allowed by right of office to be seated in the midst of their noble charges, who all remained standing.

One of the first to mingle with these dangerous bevies was the Duc d'Orléans, the King's brother, who came down from his rooms above, attended by his tutor, Monsieur de Cypierre. This young Prince, who was destined to reign

before the end of the year, under the name of Charles IX., at the age of ten was excessively shy. The Duc d'Anjou and the Duc d'Alençon, his two brothers, and the infant Princess Marguerite, who became the wife of Henri IV., were still too young to appear at Court, and remained in their mother's apartments. The Duc d'Orléans, richly dressed in the fashion of the time, in silk trunk hose, a doublet of cloth of gold, brocaded with flowers in black, and a short cloak of embroidered velvet, all black, for he was still in mourning for the late King his father, bowed to the two elder ladies, and joined the group of his mother's maids of honor. Strongly disliking the Guisards (the adherents of the Guises), he replied coldly to the Duchess' greeting, and went to lean his elbow on the back of the Countess Fieschi's tall chair.

His tutor, Monsieur de Cypierre, one of the finest characters of that age, stood behind him as a shield. Amyot, in a simple abbé's gown, also attended the Prince; he was his instructor as well as being the teacher of the three other royal children, whose favor was afterward so advantageous to him.

Between this chimney-place "of honor" and that at the farther end of the hall—where the Guards stood in groups with their captain, a few courtiers, and Christophe carrying his box—the Chancellor Olivier, l'Hôpital's patron and predecessor, in the costume worn ever since by the chancellors of France, was walking to and fro with Cardinal de Tournon, who had just arrived from Rome, and with whom he exchanged a few phrases in murmurs. On them was centred the general attention of the gentlemen packed against the wall dividing the hall from the King's bedroom, standing like a living tapestry against the rich figured hangings. In spite of the serious state of affairs, the Court presented the same appearance as every Court must, in every country, at every time, and in the midst of the greatest perils. Courtiers always talk of the most trivial subjects while thinking of the gravest, jesting while watching every physiognomy, and considering questions of

love and marriage with heiresses in the midst of the most sanguinary catastrophes.

"What did you think of yesterday's fête?" asked Bourdeilles, the Lord of Brantôme, going up to Mademoiselle de Piennes, one of the elder Queen's maids of honor.

"Monsieur du Baïf and Monsieur du Bellay had had the most charming ideas," said she, pointing to the two gentlemen who had arranged everything, and who were standing close at hand. "I thought it in atrocious taste," she added in a whisper.

"You had no part in it?" said Miss Lewiston from the other side.

"What are you reading, madame?" said Amyot to Madame Fieschi.

"'Amadis de Gaule,' by the Seigneur des Essarts, purveyor-in-ordinary to the King's Artillery."

"A delightful work," said the handsome girl, who became famous as la Fosseuse, when she was lady-in-waiting to Queen Margaret of Navarre.

"The style is quite new," remarked Amyot. "Shall you adopt such barbarisms?" he asked, turning to Brantôme.

"The ladies like it! What is to be said?" cried Brantôme, going forward to bow to Madame de Guise, who had in her hand Boccaccio's "Famous Ladies." "There must be some ladies of your House there, madame," said he. "But Master Boccaccio's mistake was that he did not live in these days; he would have found ample matter to enlarge his volumes."

"How clever Monsieur de Brantôme is!" said the beautiful Mademoiselle de Limeuil to the Countess Fieschi. "He came first to us, but he will stay with the Guises."

"Hush!" said Madame Fieschi, looking at the fair Limeuil. "Attend to what concerns you——"

The young lady turned to the door. She was expecting Sardini, an Italian nobleman, who was subsequently made to

marry her after a little accident that overtook her in the Queen's dressing-room, and which procured her the honor of having a queen for her midwife.

"By Saint Alipantin, Mademoiselle Davila seems to grow prettier every morning," said Monsieur de Robertet, Secretary of State, as he bowed to the Queen-mother's ladies.

The advent of the secretary of State, though he was exactly as important as a Cabinet Minister in these days, made no sensation whatever.

"If you think that, monsieur, do lend me the epigram against the Messieurs de Guise; I know you have it," said Mademoiselle Davila to Robertet.

"I have it no longer," replied the secretary, going across to speak to Madame de Guise.

"I have it," said the Comte de Grammont to Mademoiselle Davila; "but I will lend it you only on one condition."

"On condition——? For shame!" said Madame Fieschi.

"You do not know what I want," replied Grammont.

"Oh, that is easy to guess," said la Limeuil.

The Italian custom of calling ladies, as French peasants call their wives, *la* Such-an-one, was at that time the fashion at the Court of France.

"You are mistaken," the Count replied eagerly; "what I ask is that a letter should be delivered to Mademoiselle de Matha, one of the maids on the other side—a letter from my cousin de Jarnac."

"Do not compromise my maids; I will give it to her myself," said the Countess Fieschi. "Have you heard any news of what is going on in Flanders?" she asked Cardinal de Tournon. "Monsieur d'Egmont is at some new pranks, it would seem."

"He and the Prince of Orange," said Cypierre, with a highly expressive shrug.

"The Duke of Alva and Cardinal de Granvelle are going there, are they not, monsieur?" asked Amyot of Cardinal de

Tournon, who stood, uneasy and gloomy, between the two groups after his conversation with the chancellor.

"We, happily, are quiet, and have to defy heresy only on the stage," said the young Duke, alluding to the part he had played the day before, that of a knight subduing a hydra with the word "Reformation" on its brow.

Catherine de' Medici, agreeing on this point with her daughter-in-law, had allowed a theatre to be constructed in the great hall, which was subsequently used for the meetings of the States at Blois, the hall between the buildings of Louis XII. and those of Francis I.

The cardinal made no reply, and resumed his walk in the middle of the hall, talking in a low voice to Monsieur de Robertet and the chancellor. Many persons know nothing of the difficulties that secretaryships of State, now transformed into Cabinet Ministries, met with in the course of their establishment, and how hard the Kings of France found it to create them. At that period a secretary like Robertet was merely a clerk, of hardly any account among the princes and magnates who settled the affairs of State. There were at that time no ministerial functionaries but the superintendent of finance, the chancellor, and the keeper of the king's seals. The King granted a seat in the Council, by letters patent, to such of his subjects as might, in his opinion, give useful advice in the conduct of public affairs. A seat in the Council might be given to a president of a law court in the Parlement, to a bishop, to an untitled favorite. Once admitted to the Council, the subject strengthened his position by getting himself appointed to one of the Crown offices to which a salary was attached—the government of a province, a constable's sword, a marshal's baton, the command of the Artillery, the post of High Admiral, the colonelcy of some military corps, the captaincy of the galleys—or often some function at Court, such as that of Grand Master of the household, then held by the Duc de Guise.

"Do you believe that the Duc de Nemours will marry Françoise?" asked Madame de Guise of the Duc d'Orléans' instructor.

"Indeed, madame, I know nothing but Latin," was the reply.

This made those smile who were near enough to hear it. Just then the seduction of Françoise de Rohan by the Duc de Nemours was the theme of every conversation; but as the Duc de Nemours was cousin to the King, and also allied to the House of Valois through his mother, the Guises regarded him as seduced rather than as a seducer. The influence of the House of Rohan was, however, so great, that after Francis II.'s death the Duc de Nemours was obliged to quit France in consequence of the lawsuit brought against him by the Rohans, which was compromised by the offices of the Guises. His marriage to the Duchesse de Guise, after Poltrot's assassination, may account for the Duchess' question to Amyot, by explaining some rivalry, no doubt, between her and Mademoiselle de Rohan.

"Look, pray, at that party of malcontents," said the Comte de Grammont, pointing to Messieurs de Coligny, Cardinal de Châtillon, Danville, Thoré, Moret, and several other gentlemen suspected of meddling in the Reformation, who were standing all together between two windows at the lower end of the hall.

"The Huguenots are on the move," said Cypierre. "We know that Théodore de Bèze is at Nérac to persuade the Queen of Navarre to declare herself on their side by publicly renouncing the Catholic faith," he added, with a glance at the Bailli d'Orléans, who was chancellor to the Queen of Navarre, and a keen observer of the Court.

"She will do it," said the Bailli d'Orléans drily.

This personage, the Jacques Cœur of his day, and one of the richest middle-class men of his time, was named Groslot, and was envoy from Jeanne d'Albret to the French Court.

"Do you think so?" said the Chancellor of France to the Chancellor of Navarre, quite understanding the full import of Groslot's remark.

"Don't you know," said the rich provincial, "that the Queen of Navarre has nothing of the woman in her but her sex? She is devoted to none but manly things; her mind is strong in important matters and her heart undaunted by the greatest adversities."

"Monsieur le Cardinal," said the Chancellor Olivier to Monsieur de Tournon, who had heard Groslot, "what do you think of such boldness?"

"The Queen of Navarre does well to choose for her chancellor a man from whom the House of Lorraine will need to borrow, and who offers the King his house when there is a talk of moving to Orleans," replied the cardinal.

The chancellor and the cardinal looked at each other, not daring to speak their thoughts; but Robertet expressed them, for he thought it necessary to make a greater display of devotion to the Guises than these great men, since he was so far beneath them.

"It is most unfortunate that the House of Navarre, instead of abjuring the faith of their fathers, do not abjure the spirit of revenge and rebellion inspired by the Connétable de Bourbon. We shall see a repetition of the wars of the Armagnacs and the Bourguignons."

"No," said Groslot, "for there is something of Louis XI. in the Cardinal de Lorraine."

"And in Queen Catherine too," observed Robertet.

At this moment Madame Dayelle, Mary Stewart's favorite waiting-woman, crossed the room and went to the Queen's chamber. The appearance of the waiting-woman made a little stir.

"We shall be admitted directly," said Madame Fieschi.

"I do not think so," said the Duchesse de Guise. "Their majesties will come out, for a State Council is to be held."

La Dayelle slipped into the royal chamber after scratching at the door, a deferential custom introduced by Catherine de' Medici and adopted by the French Court.

"What is the weather like, my dear Dayelle?" asked Queen Mary, putting her fair, fresh face out between the curtains.

"Oh! madame——"

"What is the matter, Dayelle? You might have the bowmen at your heels——"

"Oh! madame—is the King still sleeping?"

"Yes."

"We are to leave the castle, and Monsieur le Cardinal desired me to tell you so, that you might suggest it to the King."

"Do you know why, my good Dayelle?"

"The Reformers mean to carry you off."

"Oh, this new religion leaves me no peace! I dreamed last night that I was in prison—I who shall wear the united crowns of the three finest kingdoms in the world."

"Indeed! but, madame, it was only a dream."

"Carried off! That would be rather amusing. But for the sake of religion, and by heretics—horrible!"

The Queen sprang out of bed and seated herself in front of the fireplace in a large chair covered with red velvet, after wrapping herself in a loose black velvet gown handed to her by Dayelle, which she tied about the waist with a silken cord. Dayelle lighted the fire, for the early May mornings are cool on the banks of the Loire.

"Then did my uncles get this news in the course of the night?" the Queen inquired of Dayelle, with whom she was on familiar terms.

"Early this morning Messieurs de Guise were walking on the terrace to avoid being overheard, and received there some messengers arriving in hot haste from various parts of the kingdom where the Reformers are busy. Her highness the

Queen-mother went out with her Italians hoping to be consulted, but she was not invited to join the little council."

"She must be furious."

"All the more so because she had a little wrath left over from yesterday," replied Dayelle. "They say she was far from rejoiced by the sight of your majesty in your dress of woven gold and your pretty veil of tan-colored crepe——"

"Leave us now, my good Dayelle; the King is waking. Do not let any one in, not even those who have the *entrée*. There are matters of State in hand and my uncles will not disturb us."

"Why, my dear Mary, are you out of bed already? Is it daylight?" said the young King, rousing himself.

"My dear love, while we were quietly sleeping, malignants have been wide awake, and compel us to leave this pleasant home."

"What do you mean by malignants, my sweetheart? Did we not have the most delightful festival last evening, but for the Latin which those gentlemen insisted on dropping into our good French?"

"Oh!" said Mary, "that is in the best taste, and Rabelais brought Latin into fashion."

"Ah! you are so learned, and I am only sorry not to be able to do you honor in verse. If I were not King, I would take back Master Amyot from my brother, who is being made so wise——"

"You have nothing to envy your brother for; he writes verses and shows them to me, begging me to show him mine. Be content, you are by far the best of the four, and will be as good a king as you are a charming lover. Indeed, that perhaps is the reason your mother loves you so little. But be easy; I, dear heart, will love you for all the world."

"It is no great merit in me to love such a perfect Queen," said the young King. "I do not know what hindered me from embracing you before the whole Court last night, when

you danced the *branle** with tapers. I could see how all the women looked serving-wenches by you, my sweet Marie!"

"For plain prose your language is charming, my dear heart: it is love that speaks, to be sure. And you know, my dear, that if you were but a poor little page, I should still love you just as much as I now do, and yet it is a good thing to be able to say, 'My sweetheart is a king!'"

"Such a pretty arm! Why must we get dressed? I like to push my fingers through your soft hair and tangle your golden curls. Listen, pretty one; I will not allow you to let your women kiss your fair neck and your pretty shoulders any more! I am jealous of the Scotch mists for having touched them."

"Will you not come to see my beloved country? The Scotch would love you, and there would be no rebellions, as there are here."

"Who rebels in our kingdom?" said François de Valois, wrapping himself in his gown, and drawing his wife on to his knee.

"Yes, this is very pretty play," said she, withdrawing her cheek from his kiss. "But you have to reign, if you please, my liege."

"Who talks of reigning? This morning I want to——"

"Need you say 'I want to,' when you can do what you will? That is the language of neither king nor lover. However, that is not the matter on hand—we have important business to attend to."

"Oh!" said the King, "it is a long time since we have had any business to do. Is it amusing?"

"Not at all," said Mary; "we must make a move."

"I will wager, my pretty one, that you have seen one of your uncles, who manage matters so well that, at seventeen, I am a king only in name. I really know not why, since the first Council, I have ever sat at one; they could do everything

* A swaying, jerky dance.

quite as well by setting a crown on my chair; I see everything through their eyes, and settle matters blindfold."

"Indeed, monsieur," said the Queen, standing up and assuming an air of annoyance, "you had agreed never again to give me the smallest trouble on that score, but to leave my uncles to exercise your royal power for the happiness of your people. A nice people they are! Why, if you tried to govern them unaided, they would swallow you whole like a strawberry. They need warriors to rule them—a stern master gloved with iron; while you—you are a charmer whom I love just as you are, and should not love if you were different—do you hear, my lord?" she added, bending down to kiss the boy, who seemed inclined to rebel against this speech, but who was mollified by the caress.

"Oh, if only they were not your uncles!" cried Francis. "I cannot endure that cardinal; and when he puts on his insinuating air and his submissive ways, and says to me with a bow, 'Sire, the honor of the Crown and the faith of your fathers are at stake, your majesty will never allow——' and this and that—I am certain he toils for nothing but his cursed House of Lorraine."

"How well you mimic him!" cried the Queen. "But why do you not make these Guises inform you of what is going forward, so as to govern by-and-by on your own account when you are of full age? I am your wife, and your honor is mine. We will reign, sweetheart—never fear! But all will not be roses for us till we are free to please ourselves. There is nothing so hard for a king as to govern!

"Am I the Queen now, I ask you? Do you think that your mother ever fails to repay me in evil for what good my uncles may do for the glory of your throne? And mark the difference! My uncles are great princes, descendants of Charlemagne, full of good-will, and ready to die for you; while this daughter of a leech, or a merchant, Queen of France by a mere chance, is as shrewish as a citizen's wife who is not

mistress in her house. The Italian woman is provoked that she cannot set every one by the ears, and she is always coming to me with her pale, solemn face, and then with her pinched lips she begins: 'Daughter, you are the Queen; I am only the second lady in the kingdom'—she is furious, you see, dear heart—'but if I were in your place I would not wear crimson velvet while the Court is in mourning, and I would appear in pnblic with my hair plainly dressed and with no jewels, for what is unseemly in any lady is even more so in a queen. Nor would I dance myself; I would only see others dance!' That is the kind of thing she says to me."

"Oh, dear heaven!" cried the King, "I can hear her! Mercy, if she only knew——"

"Why, you still quake before her. She wearies you—say so? We will send her away. By my faith, that she should deceive you might be endured, but to be so tedious——"

"In heaven's name, be silent, Marie," said the King, at once alarmed and delighted. "I would not have you lose her favor."

"Never fear that she will quarrel with me, with the three finest crowns in the world on my head, my little King," said Mary Stewart. "Even though she hates me for a thousand reasons, she flatters me, to win me from my uncles."

"Hates you?"

"Yes, my angel! And if I had not a thousand such proofs as women can give each other, and such as women only can understand, her persistent opposition to our happy lovemaking would be enough. Now, is it my fault if your father could never endure Mademoiselle de' Medici? In short, she likes me so little that you had to be quite in a rage to prevent our having separate sets of rooms here and at Saint-Germain. She declared that it was customary for the Kings and Queens of France. Customary! It was your father's custom; that is quite intelligible. As to your grandfather, Francis, that good man established the practice for the convenience of his

love affairs. So be on your guard; if we are obliged to leave this place, do not let the Grand Master divide us."

"If we leave? But I do not intend to leave this pretty castle, whence we see the Loire and all the country round—a town at our feet, the brightest sky in the world above us, and these lovely gardens. Or if I go, it will be to travel with you in Italy and see Raphael's pictures and Saint-Peter's at Rome."

"And the orange trees. Ah, sweet little King, if you could know how your Mary longs to walk under orange trees in flower and fruit! Alas! I may never see one! Oh! to hear an Italian song under those fragrant groves, on the shore of a blue sea, under a cloudless sky, and to clasp each other thus!——"

"Let us be off," said the King.

"Be off!" cried the Grand Master, coming in. "Yes, Sire, you must be off from Blois. Pardon my boldness, but circumstances overrule etiquette, and I have come to beg you to call a Council."

Mary and Francis had started apart on being thus taken by surprise, and they both wore the same expression of offended sovereign majesty.

"You are too much the Grand Master, Monsieur de Guise," said the young King, suppressing his wrath.

"Devil take lovers!" muttered the cardinal in Catherine's ear.

"My son," replied the Queen-mother, appearing behind the cardinal, "the safety of your person is at stake as well as of your kingdom."

"Heresy was awake while you slept, Sire," said the cardinal.

"Withdraw into the hall," said the little King; "we will hold a Council."

"Madame," said the Duke to the Queen, "your furrier's son has come with some furs which are seasonable for your journey, as we shall probably ride by the Loire. But he also

wishes to speak with madame," he added, turning to the Queen-mother. "While the King is dressing, would you and her majesty dismiss him forthwith, so that this trifle may no further trouble us?"

"With pleasure," replied Catherine; adding to herself, "If he thinks to be rid of me by such tricks, he little knows me."

The cardinal and the Duke retired, leaving the two Queens with the King. As he went through the guardroom to go to the council chamber, the Grand Master desired the usher to bring up the Queen's furrier.

When Christophe saw this official coming toward him from one end of the room to the other, he took him, from his dress, to be some one of importance, and his heart sank within him; but this sensation, natural enough at the approach of a critical moment, became sheer terror when the usher, whose advance had the effect of directing the eyes of the whole splendid assembly to Christophe with his bundles and his abject looks, said to him—

"Their highnesses the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Grand Master desire to speak to you in the council-room."

"Has any one betrayed me?" was the thought of this hapless envoy of the Reformers.

Christophe followed the usher, his eyes bent on the ground, and never looked up till he found himself in the spacious council-room—as large almost as the guardroom. The two Guises were alone, standing in front of the splendid chimney-place that backed against that in the guardroom, where the maids of honor were grouped.

"You have come from Paris? Which road did you take?" the cardinal said to Christophe.

"I came by water, monseigneur," replied the lad.

"And how did you get into Blois?" said the Grand Master.

"By the river-port, monseigneur."

"And no one interfered with you?" said the Duke, who was examining the young man closely.

"No, monseigneur. I told the first soldier, who made as though he would stop me, that I had come on duty to wait on the two Queens, and that my father is furrier to their majesties."

"What is doing in Paris?" asked the cardinal.

"They are still trying to discover the murderer who killed President Minard."

"Are you not the son of my surgeon's greatest friend?" asked the Duc de Guise, deceived by Christophe's expression of candor, now that his fears were allayed.

"Yes, monseigneur."

The Grand Master went out, hastily lifted the curtain which screened the double doors of the council chamber, and showed his face to the crowd, among whom he looked for the King's surgeon-in-chief. Ambroise Paré, standing in a corner, was aware of a glance shot at him by the Duke and went to him. Ambroise, already inclined to the Reformed religion, ended by adopting it; but the friendship of the Guises and of the French kings preserved him from the various disasters that befell the heretics. The Duke, who felt that he owed his life to Ambroise Paré, had appointed him surgeon-in-chief to the King within a few days past.

"What is it, monseigneur," said the leech. "Is the King ill? I should not be surprised."

"Why?"

"The Queen is too fascinating," said the surgeon.

"Ah!" replied the Duke, surprised. "However, that is not the case," he went on after a pause. "Ambroise, I want you to see a friend of yours," and he led him on to the threshold of the council-chamber door and pointed to Christophe.

"Ah, to be sure," cried the surgeon, holding out his hand to the youth. "How is your father, my boy?"

"Very well, Master Ambroise," Christophe replied.

"And what are you doing at Court?" Paré went on. "It is not your business to carry parcels; your father wants to make a lawyer of you. Do you want the protection of these two great Princes to become a pleader?"

"Why, yes, indeed," replied Christophe, "but for my father's sake; and if you can intercede for us, add your entreaties," he went on, with a piteous air, "to obtain an order from Monseigneur the Grand Master for the payment of the moneys due to my father, for he does not know which way to turn——"

The cardinal and his brother looked at each other, and seemed to be satisfied.

"Leave us now," said the Grand Master to Ambroise with a nod. "And you, my friend," he added to Christophe, "settle your business quickly, and get back to Paris. My secretary will give you a pass, for, by heaven, the roads will not be pleasant to travel on!"

Neither of the brothers had the slightest suspicion of the important interests that lay in Christophe's hands, being now quite assured that he was certainly the son of Lecamus, a good Catholic, purveyor to the Court, and that he had come solely to get his money.

"Take him around to be near the door of the Queen's chamber; she will ask for him no doubt," said the cardinal to the surgeon.

While the furrier's son was being thus cross-questioned in the council-room, the King had left his mother and the Queen together, having gone into his dressing-room, which was beyond a room adjoining the bedroom.

Catherine, standing in the recess of the deep window, was looking out on the garden, lost in melancholy thought. She foresaw that one of the greatest commanders of the age, in the course of that morning, in the very next hour, would take the place of her son the King, under the terrible title of

lieutenant-general of the kingdom. In the face of such peril she was alone, without a plan, without defense. Indeed, as she stood there in her mourning, which she had not ceased to wear since the death of Henri II., she might have been compared to a phantom, so still were her pale features as she stood absorbed in thought. Her black eye seemed to wander in the indecision for which great politicians are so often blamed, which in them is the result of the breadth of sight which enables them to see every difficulty, and to balance one against the other, adding up the sum-total of risk before taking a part. There was a ringing in her ears, a turmoil in her blood; but she stood there, nevertheless, calm and dignified, while gauging the depths of the political abyss beyond the real gulf that lay at her feet.

Since the day when the Vidame de Chartres had been arrested, this was the second of those terrible days of which there were henceforth to be so many in the course of her royal career; but she never again made a mistake in the school of power. Though the sceptre seemed always to fly from her grasp, she meant to seize it, and, in fact, did seize it, by that sheer force of will which had never given way to the scorn of her father-in-law, Francis I., and his Court—by whom, though Dauphiness, she had been so little thought of—nor to the constant denials of Henri II., nor to the unresting antagonism of her rival, Diane de Poitiers. A man would not have understood this Queen in check; but Mary Stewart, so fair, so crafty, so clever, so girlish, and yet so omniscient, watched her out of the corner of her eye while affecting to warble an Italian air with an indifferent countenance. Without understanding the tempest of ambition which brought a cold moisture to the Florentine Queen's brow, the pretty Scotch girl, with her saucy face, knew that the high position of her uncle the Duc de Guise was filling Catherine with suppressed fury. Now, nothing amused her so much as watching her mother-in-law, whom she regarded as an intriguing adventuress, who,

having been humbled, was always prepared for revenge. The face of the elder was grave and gloomy, a little cadaverous, by reason of the livid complexion of the Italians, which by daylight looks like yellow ivory, though by candlelight it is dazzling; while the younger face was bright and fresh. At sixteen Mary Stewart had that creamy fairness for which she was so famous. Her bright rosy face, with clearly cut features, sparkled with childish mischief, very frankly expressed in the regular arch of her brows, the brightness of her eyes, and the pert smile of her pretty mouth. She had then in perfection that kittenish grace which nothing—neither captivity nor the sight of the horrible block—ever completely quelled.

Thus these two Queens, one in the morning, the other in the summer of life, were at this time a perfect contrast. Catherine was an imposing sovereign, an impenetrable widow, with no passion but the love of power. Mary was a feather-brained and light-hearted wife, who thought of her crowns as playthings. One looked forward to impending misfortunes; she even had a glimpse of the murder of the Guises, guessing that this would be the only way to strike down men who were capable of raising themselves above the throne and the Parlement; she saw rivers of blood in a long struggle—the other little dreamed that she would herself be murdered by form of law.

A curious reflection brought a little calm to the Italian Queen.

"According to the soothsayer and to Ruggieri's forecast, this reign is soon to end. My difficulties will not last," thought she.

And thus, strange to say, an occult science, now forgotten—judicial astrology—was a support to Catherine at this juncture, as it was throughout her life; for the belief grew constantly from seeing the predictions of those who practiced it realized with the greatest exactitude.

"You are very serious, madame," said Mary Stewart, taking from Dayelle's hands her little cap, pinched down over the parting of her hair with two frilled wings of handsome lace beyond the puffs of wavy yellow hair that shadowed her temples.

The painters of the time have so amply perpetuated this cap, that it now belongs essentially to the Queen of Scots, though it was Catherine who invented it when she went into mourning for Henri II.; but she could not wear it with such good effect as her daughter-in-law, to whom it was infinitely more becoming. And this was not the smallest of the grievances harbored by the Queen-mother against the young Queen.

"Does your majesty mean that for a reproof?" said Catherine, turning to her daughter-in-law.

"I owe respect, and should not dare——" said the Scotch-woman meaningly, with a glance at Dayelle.

Between the two Queens the favorite waiting-woman stood like the figure-head on a fire-dog; an approving smile might cost her her life.

"How can I be as gay as you after losing the late King, and when I see my son's kingdom on the eve of a conflagration?"

"Politics do not much concern women," replied Mary Stewart. "Beside, my uncles are there."

These two sentences, in the circumstances, were two poisoned arrows.

"Let us see our furs then," the Italian replied, "and so turn our minds to our own business, while your uncles settle that of the kingdom."

"Oh, but we shall attend the Council, madame; we are of more use there than you suppose."

"We?" said Catherine, with feigned astonishment. "I, for my part, do not know Latin!"

"You fancy me so learned?" said Mary Stewart, with a

laugh. "Nay, madame, I swear to you that at this moment I am studying in the hope of rivaling the Medici and of knowing some day how to heal the wounds of the country."

This sharp shaft pierced Catherine to the heart, for it was an allusion to the origin of the Medici, who were descended, as some said, from a leech, or, as others had it, from a rich drug merchant. She had no reply ready. Dayelle colored when her mistress looked to her for the applause which everybody, and even queens, expect from their inferiors when they have no better audience.

"Your witticisms, madame, cannot, unfortunately, heal either the maladies of the State or those of the church," said Catherine, with calm and dignified coldness. "My forefathers' knowledge of such matters won them thrones; while you, if you persist in jesting in the midst of danger, are like enough to lose yours."

At this juncture Dayelle opened the door to Christophe, shown in by the chief physician himself after scratching at the door.

The young Reformer wanted to study Catherine's countenance, and affected a shyness, which was natural enough on finding himself in this place; but he was surprised by Mary's eagerness. She rushed at the boxes to look at her surcoat.

"Madame," said Christophe, addressing Catherine.

He turned his back on the other Queen and Dayelle, promptly taking advantage of the attention the two were devoting to the furs to strike a bold blow.

"What do you want of me?" asked Catherine, looking keenly at him.

Christophe had placed the agreement proposed by the Prince de Condé, with the Reformers' plan of action and an account of their forces, over his heart, between his cloth jerkin and his shirt, wrapped inside the furrier's bill of what Queen Catherine owed him.

"Madame," said he, "my father is in dreadful want of

money, and if you would condescend to look through the accounts," he added, unfolding the paper and slipping the agreement under it, "you will see that your majesty owes him six thousand crowns. May your goodness have pity on us! See, madame."

And he held out the document.

"Read it. This dates so far back as the accession of the late King."

Catherine was bewildered by the preamble to the address, but she did not lose her presence of mind; she hastily rolled up the paper, admiring the young man's readiness and daring. She saw from these masterly tactics that he would understand her, so she tapped him on the head with the roll of paper, and said: "You are very ill advised, my young friend, in handing the bill in before the furs. Learn some knowledge of women! You must never ask for your money until we are perfectly satisfied."

"Is that the tradition?" said the young Queen to her mother-in-law, who made no reply.

"Ah, mesdames, excuse my father," said Christophe. "If he had not wanted the money, you would not have your furs. The country is up in arms, and there is so much danger on the roads that only our great need induced me to come. No one else would risk his life."

"This lad is quite fresh," said Mary Stewart, smiling.

It is not superfluous to the better understanding of this important little scene to remark that a surcoat was, as the name implies, a sort of close-fitting jacket or spencer which ladies wore over their dress, and which wrapped them closely, shaped down to the hips. This garment protected the back, chest, and throat from the cold. Surcoats were lined with fur which turned up over the stuff, forming a more or less wide border. Mary Stewart while trying on her surcoat was looking at herself in a large Venetian mirror, to see the effect of it at the back; thus she had left her mother-in-law liberty to glance at

the packet of papers, of which the volume might otherwise have excited her suspicions.

"Does a man ever speak to a lady of the dangers he has incurred when he is safe and sound in her presence?" said she, turning around on Christophe.

"Oh, madame, I have your account too," said he, looking at her with well-acted simplicity.

The young Queen looked at him from head to foot without taking the paper; but she observed, without drawing any conclusions at the moment, that he had taken Queen Catherine's bill out of his breast, and drew hers out of his pocket. Nor did she see in the lad's eyes the admiration that her beauty won her from all the world; but she was thinking so much of her surcoat that she did not at once wonder what could be the cause of his indifference.

"Take it, Dayelle," said she to the waiting-woman. "You can give the account to Monsieur de Versailles (Loménie), and desire him, for me, to pay it."

"Indeed, madame, but if you do not give me an order signed by the King, or by his highness the Grand Master, who is at hand, your gracious promise will have no effect."

"You are rather hastier than beseems a subject, my friend," said Mary Stewart. "So you do not believe in royal promises?"

The King came in dressed in his long silk hose and trunks, the breeches of the time, but wore neither doublet nor cloak; he had only a rich wrapper of velvet lined throughout with fur; for wrapper, a word of modern use, can alone describe the *négligé* of his apparel.

"Who is the rascal that doubts your word?" said the young King, who, though at a distance, had heard his wife's speech.

The door of the King's closet was hidden by the bed. This closet was subsequently called the old closet (*le Cabinet vieux*) to distinguish it from the splendid painted closet con-

structed for Henri III. on the other side of the room adjoining the hall of the States-General. Henri III. hid the assassins in the old closet, and sent to desire the Duc de Guise to attend him there; while he, during the murder, remained concealed in the new closet, whence he emerged only to see his overweening subject die—a subject for whom there could be no prison, no tribunal, no judges, no laws in the kingdom. But for these dreadful events, the historian could now hardly identify the former uses of these rooms and halls filled with soldiers. A sergeant writes to his sweetheart on the spot where Catherine gravely considered her struggle with parties.

"Come, my boy," said the Queen-mother; "I will see that you are paid. Trade must flourish, and money is its main sinew."

"Ay, go, my good youth," said the young Queen, laughing; "my august mother understands matters of trade better than I do."

Catherine was about to leave the room without replying to this innuendo; but it struck her that her indifference might arouse suspicions, and she retorted on her daughter-in-law—

"And you, my dear, trade in love."

Then she went downstairs.

"Put all those things away, Dayelle. And come to the council-room, Sire," said the young Queen to the King, enchanted at having to decide the important question of the lieutenancy of the kingdom in her mother-in-law's absence.

Mary Stewart took the King's arm. Dayelle went out first, speaking a word to the pages, and one of them—young Téligny, fated to perish miserably on the night of Saint-Bartholomew—shouted out—

"The King!"

On hearing the cry, the two musketeers carried arms, and the two pages led the way toward the council chamber between the line of courtiers on one side and the line formed by the maids of honor to the two Queens on the other. All

the members of the Council then gathered round the door of the hall, which was at no great distance from the staircase. The Grand Master, the cardinal, and the chancellor advanced to meet the two young sovereigns, who smiled to some of the maids or answered the inquiries of some of the Court favorites more intimate than the rest.

The Queen, however, evidently impatient, dragged Francis II. on toward the vast council-room. As soon as the heavy thud of the arquebusses dropping on the floor again announced that the royal pair had gone in, the pages put on their caps, and the conversations in the various groups took their course again on the immense gravity of the business about to be discussed.

"Chiverni was sent to fetch the connétable, and he has not come," said one.

"There is no prince of the blood present," remarked another.

The chancellor and Monsieur de Tournon looked anxious.

"The Grand Master has sent word to the keeper of the seals to be sure not to fail to attend this Council; a good many letters patent will be issued, no doubt."

"How is it that the Queen-mother remains below, in her own rooms, at such a juncture?"

"They are going to make things hot for us," said Groslot to Cardinal de Châtillon.

In short, every one had something to say. Some were pacing the room from end to end, others were flitting round the maids of honor, as though it could be possible to catch a few words through a wall three feet thick or two doors and the heavy curtains that screened them.

The King, seated at one end of the long table covered with blue velvet, which stood in the middle of the room, his young Queen in an armchair at his side, was waiting for his mother. Robertet was mending his pens. The two cardinals, the Grand Master, the chancellor, the keeper of the seals—in

short, the whole assembly—looked at the little King, wondering why he did not give the word for them all to be seated.

"Are we to sit in council in the absence of the Queen-mother?" the chancellor asked, addressing the young King.

The two Guises ascribed Catherine's absence to some cunning trick of their niece's. Then spurred by a significant look, the much-daring cardinal said to the King—

"Is it your majesty's good-will that we should proceed without madame your mother?"

Francis, not daring to have an opinion of his own, replied—

"Gentlemen, be seated."

The cardinal briefly pointed out the dangers of the situation. This great politician, who showed astounding skill in this business, broached the question of the lieutenancy amid utter silence. The young King was, no doubt, conscious of an awkwardness, and guessed that his mother had a real sense of the rights of the Crown and a knowledge of the danger that threatened his power, for he replied to a direct question on the cardinal's part—

"We will wait for my mother."

Enlightened by this inexplicable delay on Queen Catherine's part, Mary Stewart suddenly recalled in a single flash of thought three incidents which were clear in her memory. In the first place, the bulk of the packet presented to her mother-in-law, which she had seen, though so inattentive at the moment (for a woman who seems to see nothing is still a lynx), then the place where Christophe had carried them to separate them from hers.

"Why?" she said to herself. And then she remembered the boy's cold look, which she at once ascribed to the Reformers' hatred of the Guises' niece. A voice within her cried, "Is he not an envoy from the Huguenots?"

Acting, as all hasty persons do, on the first impulse, she exclaimed—

"I myself will go and fetch my mother."

She rushed away and down the stairs, to the great amazement of the gentlemen and ladies of the Court. She went down to her mother-in-law's rooms, crossed the guardroom, opened the door of the bedroom as stealthily as a thief, crept noiselessly over the carpet as silently as a shadow, and could see her nowhere. Then she thought she could surprise her in the splendid private room between the bedroom and the oratory. The arrangement of this oratory is perfectly recognizable to this day; the fashion of the time then allowed it to serve all the purposes in private life which are now served by a boudoir.

By a piece of good fortune, quite unaccountable when we see in how squalid a state the Crown has left this castle, the beautiful paneling of Catherine's closet exists to this day; in the fine carving the curious may still discern traces of Italian magnificence, and also discover the hiding-places the Queen-mother had contrived there.

A somewhat exact description of these curiosities is indeed indispensable to a comprehension of the scene that took place there. The woodwork at that time consisted of about a hundred and eighty small oblong panels, of which a hundred or so still remain, each carved with a different design, obviously suggested by the most elegant Italian arabesques. The wood is holm-oak; the red ground which is found under the coat of limewash, applied at the time of the cholera—a quite useless precaution—shows plainly that these panels were gilt; and in spots where the whitewash has rubbed off we see that some portions of the design were in color—blue, red, or green—against a gold background. The number of these panels shows an evident intention to cheat investigation; but if there could be a doubt, the keeper of the castle, while holding up Catherine's memory to the execration of all living men, shows to visitors, at the bottom of the paneling, and on a level with the floor, a somewhat heavy skirting which can be raised, and under which there are a number of ingenious springs. By pressing

a knob thus concealed, the Queen could open certain of these panels, known to her alone, behind which lay a hiding-place of the same oblong shape as the panels, but of varying depth. To this day a practiced hand would find it difficult to detect which of these panels would open on its invisible hinges; and when the eye was diverted by the skillfully combined colors and gilding that covered the cracks, it is easy to imagine that it was impossible to discover one or two panels among nearly two hundred.

At the moment when Mary Stewart laid her hand on the somewhat elaborate latch of the door to the closet, the Italian Queen, having convinced herself already of the importance of the Prince de Condé's schemes, had just pressed the spring hidden by the skirting, one of the panels had fallen open, and Catherine had turned to the table to take up the papers and hide them, to turn her attention to the safeguard of the devoted messenger who had brought them to her. When she heard the door open, she at once guessed that no one but Queen Mary would venture to come in unannounced.

"You are lost," she said to Christophe, seeing that she could neither hide the papers nor close the panel promptly enough to preserve the secret of her hiding-place.

Christophe's only reply was a sublime look.

"Poor fellow!" said Catherine, before turning to her daughter-in-law. "Treason, madame!" she exclaimed. "I have them fast. Send for the cardinal and the Duke. And be sure," she added, pointing to Christophe, "that this fellow does not escape!"

Thus, in an instant, this masterful woman saw that it would be necessary to give up the hapless young man; she could not hide him, it was impossible to help him to escape; and, beside, though a week ago he might have been saved, now the Guises had, since that morning, been aware of the conspiracy, and they, too, must have the lists which she held in her hand, and were drawing all the Reformers into a trap. And so,

pleased at finding her adversaries in the mind she had hoped for, now that the plot had become known, policy required her to assume the merit of discovering it.

These dreadful considerations flashed through her mind in the brief moment while the young Queen was opening the door. Mary Stewart stood silent for an instant. Her expression lost its brightness and assumed that keenness which suspicion always gives the eye, and which in her was terrible by the sudden contrast. She looked from Christophe to the Queen-mother, and from the Queen-mother to Christophe, with a glance of malignant doubt. Then she snatched up a bell, which brought in one of Catherine's maids of honor.

"Mademoiselle de Rouet, send in the captain of the Guard," said Mary Stewart, in breach of every law of etiquette, necessarily set aside in such circumstances.

While the young Queen gave her order, Catherine stood looking at Christophe as much as to say, "Courage!" The young Reformer understood, and replied by an expression which conveyed, "Sacrifice me, as they have sacrificed me!"

"Put your trust in me," Catherine answered by a gesture.

Then when her daughter-in-law turned upon her, she was deeply engaged in examining the papers.

"You are of the Reformed religion?" said Mary Stewart to Christophe.

"Yes, madame."

"Then I was not mistaken," she muttered to herself, as she read in the young man's eyes the same expression in which coldness and aversion lurked behind a look of humility.

Pardaillan appeared at once, sent down by the two Princes of Lorraine and the King. The captain sent for by Mary Stewart followed this young man—a most devoted adherent of the Guises.

"Go from me to the King, beg him, with the cardinal and the Grand Master, to come here at once, and tell them I would not take such a liberty but that something of serious

importance has occurred. Go, Pardaillan. And you, Lewiston, keep guard over this Reformed traitor," she added to the Scotchman in their native tongue, pointing to the wretched Christophe.

The two Queens did not speak till the King came. It was a terrible pause. Mary Stewart had shown her mother-in-law the whole extent of the part her uncles made her play; her unsleeping and habitual distrust stood revealed; and her youthful conscience felt how disgraceful such a part must be to a great Queen. Catherine, on her side, had betrayed herself in her alarm, and feared that she had been understood; she was trembling for the future. The two women, one ashamed and furious, the other vicious but calm, withdrew into the window-bay, one leaning on the right side, the other on the left; but their looks were so expressive that each turned away, and with a common instinct looked out of the window at the sky. These two women, clever as they were, at that moment had no more wit than the commonest. Perhaps it is always so when circumstances overpower men. There is always a moment when even genius is conscious of its smallness in the presence of a great catastrophe.

As for Christophe, he felt like a man falling into an abyss. Lewiston, the Scotch captain, listened in the silence, looking at the furrier's son and the two Queens with a soldier's curiosity. The King's entrance put an end to this painful situation.

The cardinal went straight up to Queen Catherine.

"I have in my hand all the threads of the plot hatched by the heretics; they sent this boy to me carrying this treaty and these documents," said Catherine in an undertone.

While Catherine was explaining matters to the cardinal, Queen Mary was speaking a few words in the Grand Master's ear.

"What is this all about?" asked the young King, standing alone amid this conflict of violent interests.

"The proofs of what I was telling your majesty are already to hand," said the cardinal, seizing the papers.

The Duc de Guise, unmindful of the fact that he was interrupting him, drew his brother aside and said in a whisper—

"This then makes me lieutenant-general without any opposition."

A keen glance was the cardinal's only reply, by which he conveyed to his brother that he had already appreciated the advantages to be derived from Catherine's false position.

"Who sent you?" asked the Duke of Christophe.

"Chaudieu the preacher," he replied.

"Young man, you lie," said the Duke roughly. "It was the Prince de Condé."

"The Prince de Condé, monseigneur," replied Christophe, with a look of surprise. "I never saw him. I belong to the Palais. I am working under Monsieur de Thou. I am his clerk, and he does not know that I have joined the religion. I only submitted to the preacher's entreaties."

"That will do," said the cardinal. "Call Monsieur de Robertet," he added to Lewiston, "for this young villain is craftier than old politicians. He has taken us in, my brother and me, when we should have given him the host without confession."

"You are no child, by heaven!" cried the Duke, "and you shall be treated as a man."

"They hoped to win over your august mother," said the cardinal, turning to the King, and trying to lead him aside to bring him to his way of thinking.

"Alas!" replied Catherine, speaking to her son with a reproachful air, and stopping him just as the cardinal was taking him into the oratory to subjugate him with dangerous eloquence, "you here see the effect of the position I am placed in. I am supposed to rebel against my lack of influence in public affairs—I, the mother of four princes of the House of Valois."

The young King prepared to listen. Mary Stewart, seeing his brow knit, led him off into the window recess, where she cajoled him with gentle speeches in a low voice; much the same, no doubt, as those she had lavished on him when he arose.

The two brothers meanwhile read the papers handed over to them by the Queen-mother. Finding in them much information of which their spies and Monsieur de Braguelonne, the governor of the châtelet, knew nothing, they were inclined to believe in Catherine's good faith. Robertet came in and had private instructions with regard to Christophe. The hapless tool of the leaders of the Reformation was led away by four men of the Scotch Guard, who took him downstairs and handed him over to Monsieur de Montrésor, the provost of the castle. This terrible personage himself escorted Christophe with five or six sergeants to the prison situated in the vaulted cellars of the now ruined tower, which the verger of the Castle of Blois shows the visitor, and says that these were the *oubliettes* (dungeons).

After such an event the Council could only be an empty form: the King, the young Queen, the Grand Master, and the Cardinal de Lorraine went back to the council-room, taking with them Catherine, quite conquered, who only spoke to approve of the measures demanded by the Guises. In spite of some slight opposition on the part of the Chancellor Olivier, the only person to utter a word suggesting the independence needful to the exercise of his functions, the Duc de Guise was appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom. Robertet carried the motions with a promptitude arguing such devotion as might be well called complicity.

The King, with his mother on his arm, once more crossed the guardroom, and announced to the Court that he proposed to move to Amboise on the following day. This royal residence had been unused since Charles VIII. had very involuntarily killed himself there by striking his head against the

pediment of a door that was being carved for him, believing that he could pass under the scaffolding without bending his head. Catherine, to mask the schemes of the Guises, had announced her intention of finishing the Castle of Amboise on behalf of the Crown at the same time as her own Castle of Chenonceaux. But no one was deceived by this pretense, and the Court anticipated strange events.

After spending about two hours in accustoming himself to the darkness of his dungeon, Christophe found that it was lined with boards, clumsy indeed, but thick enough to make the square box healthy and habitable. The door, like that into a pig-sty, had compelled him to bend double to get into it. On one side of this trap a strong iron grating admitted a little air and light from the passage. This arrangement, exactly like that of the crypts at Venice, showed very plainly that the architect of the Castle of Blois belonged to the Venetian school, which gave so many builders to Europe in the Middle Ages. By sounding the wall above the woodwork, Christophe discovered that the two walls which divided this cell from two others, to the right and left, were built of brick; and as he knocked, to estimate the thickness of the wall, he was not a little surprised to hear some one knocking on the other side.

"Who are you?" asked his neighbor, speaking into the corridor.

"I am Christophe Lecamus."

"And I," said the other voice, "am Captain Chaudieu. I was caught this evening at Beaugency; but, happily, there is nothing against me."

"Everything is discovered," said Christophe; "so you are saved from the worst of it."

"We have three thousand men at this present time in the forests of Vendômois, all men determined enough to seize the Queen-mother and the King on their journey. Happily, la

Renaudie was cleverer than I; he escaped. You had just set out when the Guisards caught us."

"But I know nothing of la Renaudie."

"Pooh! my brother told me everything," replied the captain.

On hearing this, Christophe went back to his bench and made no further reply to anything the so-called captain could say to him, for he had had enough experience of the law to know how necessary it was to be cautious in prison.

In the middle of the night he saw the pale gleam of a lantern in the passage, after hearing the unlocking of the ponderous bolts that closed the iron door of the cellar. The provost himself had come to fetch Christophe. This attention to a man who had been left in the dungeon without food struck Christophe as strange; but the upset at Court had, no doubt, led to his being forgotten. One of the provost's sergeants bound his hands with a cord, which he held till they had reached one of the low rooms in Louis XII.'s part of the castle, which evidently was the anteroom to the apartments of some person of importance. The sergeant and the provost bid him be seated on a bench, where the sergeant tied his feet as he had already tied his hands. At a sign from Monsieur de Montrésor, the sergeant then left them.

"Now listen to me, my young friend," said the provost to Christophe, and the lad observed that he was in full dress at that hour of the night, for his fingers fidgeted with the collar of his Order. This circumstance made the furrier's son thoughtful; he saw that there was more to come. At this moment, certainly, they could not be going either to try him or to hang him.

"My young friend, you may spare yourself much suffering by telling me here and now all you know of the communications between Queen Catherine and Monsieur de Condé. Not only will you not be hurt, but you will be taken into the service of monseigneur, the lieutenant-general of the king-

dom, who likes intelligent people, and who was favorably impressed by your looks. The Queen-mother is to be packed off to Florence, and Monsieur de Condé will no doubt stand his trial. So, take my word for it, small men will do well to attach themselves to the great men in power. Tell me everything, and it will be to your advantage."

"Alas, monsieur," replied Christophe, "I have nothing to say. I have confessed all I know to Messieurs de Guise in the Queen's room. Chaudieu persuaded me to place those papers in the hands of the Queen-mother, by making me believe that the peace of the country was involved."

"You never saw the Prince de Condé?"

"Never," said Christophe.

Thereupon Monsieur de Montrésor left Christophe and went into an adjoining room.

Christophe was not long left to himself. The door by which he had entered soon opened for several men to pass in, who did not shut it, letting various far from pleasant sounds come in from the courtyard. Blocks of wood and instruments were brought in, evidently intended to torture the Reformers' messenger. Christophe's curiosity soon found matter for reflection in the preparations the new-comers were making under his very eyes. Two coarse and poorly-clad varlets obeyed the orders of a powerful and thick-set man, who, on coming in, had a look at Christophe like that of a cannibal at his victim; he had scrutinized him from head to foot, taking stock of his sinews, of their strength and power of resistance, with the calculating eye of a connoisseur. This man was the Blois executioner. Backward and forward several times, his men brought in a mattress, wooden wedges, planks, and other objects, of which the use seemed neither obvious nor hopeful to the unhappy boy for whom the preparations were being made, and whose blood ran cold in his veins with apprehension, which though vague was appalling. Two other men came in when Monsieur de Montrésor reappeared.

"What, is nothing ready yet?" said the chief provost, to whom the two new-comers bowed respectfully. "Do you know," he went on to the big man and his two satellites, "that Monsieur le Cardinal supposes you to be getting on with your work? Doctor," he added, turning to one of the new-comers, "there is your man," and he pointed to Christophe.

The doctor went up to the prisoner, untied his hands, and sounded his back and chest. Science quite seriously repeated the torturer's investigation. Meanwhile, a servant in the livery of the House of Guise brought in several chairs, a table, and all the materials for writing.

"Begin your report," said Monsieur de Montrésor to the second person who had come in, dressed in black, who was a clerk.

Then he came back to stand by Christophe, to whom he said very mildly—

"My boy, the chancellor, having learnt that you refuse to give satisfactory replies to my questions, has decided that you must be put to the torture—ordinary and extraordinary."

"Is he in good health, and can he bear it?" the clerk asked of the doctor.

"Yes," said the man of medicine, a physician attached to the House of Lorraine.

"Well, then, retire to the adjoining room; we will send for you if it is necessary to consult you."

The physician left the room.

His first panic past, Christophe collected all his courage. The hour of his martyrdom was come. He now looked on with cold curiosity at the arrangements made by the executioner and his varlets. After hastily making up a bed, they proceeded to prepare a machine called the boot, consisting of boards, between which each leg of the victim was placed, surrounded with pads. The machinery used by bookbinders to press the volumes between two boards, which they tighten with cords, will give a very exact idea of the way in which each

leg was encased. It is easy, then, to imagine the effect of a wedge driven home by a mallet between the two cases in which the legs were confined, and which, being tightly bound with rope, could not yield. The wedges were driven in at the knees and ankles, as if to split a log of wood. The choice of these two spots where there is least flesh, and where, in consequence, the wedge found room at the expense of the bones, made this form of torture horribly painful. In ordinary torture four wedges were driven in—two at the knees and two at the ankles; in extraordinary torture as many as eight were employed, if the physician pronounced that the victim's powers of endurance were not exhausted.

At this period the boots were also applied to the hands; but as time pressed, the cardinal, the lieutenant-general of the kingdom, and the chancellor spared Christophe this.

The preamble to the examination was written; the provost himself had dictated a few sentences, walking about the room with a meditative air, and requiring Christophe to tell him his name—Christian name—age, and profession; then he asked him from whom he had received the papers he had delivered to the Queen.

"From Chaudieu the minister," said he.

"Where did he give them to you?"

"At my own home in Paris."

"When he handed them to you, he must have told you whether the Queen-mother would receive you well."

"He told me nothing of the kind," replied Christophe. "He only desired me to give them secretly to Queen Catherine."

"Then have you often seen Chaudieu, that he knew that you were coming here?"

"It was not from me that he heard that I was to carry the furs to the two Queens, and at the same time to ask in my father's behalf for the money owed him by the Queen-mother; nor had I time to ask him who had told him."

"But those papers, given to you without any wrapper or seal, contain a treaty between the rebels and Queen Catherine. You must have known that they exposed you to the risk of suffering the punishment dealt out to those who are implicated in a rebellion."

"Yes."

"The persons who induced you to commit an act of high treason must have promised you some reward and the Queen-mother's patronage."

"I did it out of attachment to Chaudieu, the only person whom I saw."

"Then you persist in declaring that you did not see the Prince de Condé?"

"Yes."

"Did not the Prince de Condé tell you that the Queen-mother was inclined to enter into his views in antagonism to the Guises?"

"I did not see him."

"Take care. One of your accomplices, la Renaudie, is arrested. Strong as he is, he could not resist the torture that awaits you, and at last confessed that he, as well as the Prince, had had speech with you. If you wish to escape the anguish of torture, I beg you to tell the simple truth. Then, perhaps, you may win your pardon."

Christophe replied that he could not tell anything of which he had no knowledge, nor betray accomplices when he had none. On hearing this, the provost nodded to the executioner, and went back into the adjoining room.

On seeing this, Christophe knit his brows, wrinkling his forehead with a nervous spasm, and preparing to endure. He clenched his fists with such a rigid clutch that the nails ran into the flesh without his feeling it. The three men took him up, carried him to the camp bed, and laid him there, his legs hanging down. While the executioner tied him fast with stout ropes, his two men each fitted a leg into a boot; the

cords were tightened by means of a wrench without giving the victim any great pain. When each leg was thus held in a vise, the executioner took up his mallet and his wedges, and looked alternately at the sufferer and the clerk.

"Do you persist in your denial?" said the clerk.

"I have told the truth," replied Christophe.

"Then go on," said the clerk, shutting his eyes.

The cords were tightened to the utmost, and this moment, perhaps, was the most agonizing of all the torture; the flesh was so suddenly compressed that the blood was violently thrown back into the trunk. The poor boy could not help screaming terribly; he seemed about to faint. The doctor was called back. He felt Christophe's pulse, and desired the executioner to wait for a quarter of an hour before driving in the wedges, to give time for the blood to recover its circulation and sensation to return.

The clerk charitably told Christophe that if he could not better endure even the beginnings of the suffering he could not escape, he would do better to reveal all he knew; but Christophe's only reply was—

"The King's tailor! the King's tailor!"

"What do you mean by saying that?" asked the clerk.

"Foreseeing the torments I shall go through," said Christophe, slowly, to gain time and to rest, "I am summoning all my strength, and trying to reinforce it by remembering the martyrdom endured for the sacred cause of the Reformation by the late King's tailor, who was tortured in the presence of the King and of Madame de Valentinois; I will try to be worthy of him!"

While the physician was advising the hapless man not to drive his torturers to extremities, the cardinal and the Duke, impatient to know the results of this examination, came in and desired Christophe to reveal the truth at once. The furrier's son repeated the only confession he would allow himself to make, implicating nobody but Chaudieu.

The Princes nodded. On this, the executioner and his foreman seized their mallets, each took a wedge and drove it home between the boots, one standing on the right, and the other on the left. The executioner stood at the knees, the assistant at the ankles, opposite. The eyes of the witnesses of this hideous act were fixed on Christophe's, who, excited no doubt by the presence of these grand personages, flashed such a look at them that his eyes sparkled like flame.

At the two next wedges a horrible groan escaped him. Then when he saw the men take up the wedges for the severer torture, he remained silent; but his gaze assumed such dreadful fixity, and flashed at the two Princes such a piercing magnetic fluid, that the Duke and the cardinal were both obliged to look down. Philippe le Bel had experienced the same defeat when he presided at the torture by hammer, inflicted in his presence on the Templars. This consisted in hitting the victim on the chest with one arm of the balanced hammer used to coin money, which was covered with a leather pad. There was one knight whose eyes were so fixed on the King that he was fascinated, and could not take his gaze off the sufferer. At the third blow the King rose and went away, after hearing himself called upon to appear before the judgment of God within a year—as he did.

At the fifth wedge, the first of the greater torture, Christophe said to the cardinal—

"Cut my misery short, monseigneur; it is useless."

The cardinal and the Duke withdrew, and Christophe could hear from the next room these words, spoken by Queen Catherine—

"Go on, go on; after all, he is only a heretic!"

She thought it prudent to appear more severe to her accomplice than his executioners were.

The sixth and seventh wedge were driven in, and Christophe complained no more, his face shone with a strange radiance, due, no doubt, to the immense strength he derived

from fanatical excitement. In what else but in feeling can we hope to find the fulcrum enabling a man to endure such anguish? At last, when the executioner was about to insert the eighth wedge, Christophe smiled. This dreadful torment had lasted one hour.

The clerk went to fetch the leech, to know whether the eighth wedge could be driven in without endangering the sufferer's life. The Duke meanwhile came in again to see Christophe.

"By our Lady! you are a fine fellow," said he, leaning down to speak in his ear. "I like a brave man. Enter my service, you shall be happy and rich, my favors will heal your bruised limbs; I will ask you to do nothing cowardly, like rejoining your own party to betray their plans; there are always plenty of traitors, and the proof is to be found in the prisons of Blois. Only tell me on what terms are the Queen-mother and the Prince de Condé."

"I know nothing about it, monseigneur," cried Lecamus.

The doctor came in, examined the victim, and pronounced that he could bear the eighth wedge.

"Drive it in," said the cardinal. "After all, as the Queen says, he is only a heretic," he added, with a hideous smile at Christophe.

Catherine herself slowly came in from the adjoining room, stood in front of Christophe, and gazed at him coldly. She was the object of attentive scrutiny to the two brothers, who looked alternately at the Queen-mother and her accomplice. The whole future life of this ambitious woman depended on this solemn scrutiny; she felt the greatest admiration for Christophe's courage, and she looked at him sternly; she hated the Guises, and she smiled upon them.

"Come," said she, "young man, confess that you saw the Prince de Condé; you will be well rewarded."

"Oh, madame, what a part you are playing!" cried Christophe, in pity for her.

The Queen started.

"He is insulting me! Is he not to be hanged?" said she to the two brothers, who stood lost in thought.

"What a woman!" cried the Grand Master, who was consulting his brother in the window recess.

"I will stay in France and be revenged," thought the Queen. "Proceed, he must confess or let him die!" she exclaimed, addressing Monsieur de Montrésor.

The provost turned away, the executioners were busy, Catherine had an opportunity of giving the martyr a look, which no one else saw, and which fell like dew on Christophe. The great Queen's eyes seemed to glisten with moisture; they were, in fact, full of tears, two tears at once repressed and dry. The wedge was driven home, one of the boards between which it was inserted split. Christophe uttered a piercing cry; then his face became radiant; he thought he was dying.

"Let him die," said the cardinal, echoing Queen Catherine's words with a sort of irony. "No, no," he added to the provost, "do not let us lose this clue."

The Duke and the cardinal held a consultation in a low voice.

"What is to be done with him?" asked the executioner.

"Send him to prison at Orleans," said the Duke. "And, above all," he said to Monsieur de Montrésor, "do not hang him without orders from me."

The excessive sensitiveness of every internal organ, strung to the highest pitch by the endurance which worked upon every nerve in his frame, no less affected every sense in Christophe. He alone heard these words spoken by the Duc de Guise in the cardinal's ear—

"I have not given up all hope of hearing the truth from this little man."

As soon as the two Princes had left the room, the executioners unpacked the victim's legs, with no attempt at gentle handling.

"Did you ever see a criminal with such fortitude?" said the head man to his assistants. "The rogue has lived through the infliction of the eighth wedge; he ought to have died. I am the loser of the price of his body."

"Untie me without hurting me, my good friends," said poor Christophe. "Some day I will reward you."

"Come, show some humanity," said the doctor. "Monseigneur the Duke esteems the young man, and commended him to my care," cried the leech.

"I am off to Amboise with my men," said the executioner roughly. "Take care of him yourself. And here is the gaoler."

The executioner went off, leaving Christophe in the hands of the smooth-spoken doctor, who, with the help of Christophe's warder, lifted him on to a bed, gave him some broth, which he made him swallow, sat down by his side, felt his pulse, and tried to comfort him.

"You are not dying," he said, "and you must feel a comfort to your mind when you reflect that you have done your duty. The Queen charged me to take good care of you," he added, in a low voice.

"The Queen is very good," said Christophe, in whom acute anguish had developed wonderful lucidity of mind, and who, after enduring so much, was determined not to spoil the results of his devotion. "But she might have saved me so much suffering by not delivering me to my tormentors, and by telling them herself the secrets, of which I most truly know nothing."

On hearing this reply, the doctor put on his cap and cloak and left Christophe to his fate, thinking it vain to hope to gain anything from a man of that temper. The gaoler had the poor boy carried on a litter by four men to the town prison, where Christophe fell asleep, in that deep slumber which, it is said, comes upon almost every mother after the dreadful pains of childbirth.

The two Princes of Lorraine, when they transferred the Court to Amboise, had no hope of finding there the leader of the Reformed party, the Prince de Condé, whom they had ordered to appear in the King's name to take him in a snare. As a vassal of the Crown and as a Prince of the Blood, Condé was bound to obey the behest of the King. Not to come to Amboise would be a felony; but, by coming, he would place himself in the power of the Crown. Now, at this moment, the Crown, the Council, the Court, and every kind of power were in the hands of the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine.

In this difficult dilemma, the Prince de Condé showed the spirit of decisiveness and astuteness, which made him a worthy representative of Jeanne d'Albret and the brave general of the Reformers' forces. He traveled at the heels of the last conspirators to Vendôme to support them in case of success. But when this first rush to arms ended in the brief skirmish in which the flower of the nobility whom Calvin had misled all perished, the Prince, and a following of fifty gentlemen, arrived at the château d'Amboise the very day after this affair, which the Guises, with crafty policy, spoke of as the riots at Amboise. On hearing of the Prince's advance, the Duke sent out the Maréchal de Saint-André to receive him with an escort of a hundred men-at-arms. When the Béarnais came to the gate of the castle, the marshal in command refused to admit the Prince's suite.

"You must come in alone, sir," said the Chancellor Olivier, Cardinal de Tournon, and Birague, who awaited him outside the portcullis.

"And why?"

"You are suspected of felony," replied the chancellor.

The Prince, who saw that his party was being cut off by the Duc de Nemours, quietly replied—

"If that is the case, I will go into my cousin alone and prove my innocence."

He dismounted and conversed with perfect freedom with Birague, Tournon, the Chancellor Olivier, and the Duc de Nemours, from whom he asked details of the riot.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Nemours, "the rebels had sympathizers inside Amboise. Captain Lanoue had gotten in some men-at-arms, who opened the gate to them through which they got into the town, and of which they had the command——"

"That is to say, you got them into a sack," replied the Prince, looking at Birague.

"If they had been supported by the attack that was to have been made on the Gate of Bons-Hommes by Captain Chaudieu, the preacher's brother, they would have succeeded," said the Duc de Nemours, "but, from the position I had taken up, in obedience to the Duc de Guise, Captain Chaudieu was obliged to make a detour to avoid fighting me. Instead of arriving at night like the rest, that rebel did not come up till daybreak, just as the King's troops had crushed those who had got into the town."

"And you had a reserve to recapture the gate that had been given up to them?"

"Monsieur le Maréchal de Saint-André was on the spot with five hundred men."

The Prince warmly praised these military manœuvres.

"To have acted thus," said he in conclusion, "the lieutenant-general must certainly have known the Reformers' secrets. They have evidently been betrayed."

The Prince was treated with greater strictness at each step. After being parted from his followers on entering the castle, the cardinal and the chancellor stood in his way when he turned to the stairs leading to the King's apartments.

"We are instructed by the King, sir, to conduct you to your own rooms."

"Am I then a prisoner?"

"If that were the King's purpose, you would not be at-

tended by a prince of the church and by me," replied the chancellor.

The two functionaries led the Prince to an apartment where a guard—of honor so called—was allotted to him, and where he remained for several hours without seeing any one. From his window he looked out on the Loire, the rich country which makes such a beautiful valley between Amboise and Tours, and he was meditating on his situation, wonderiug what the Guises might dare to do to his person, when he heard the door of his room open, and saw the King's fool come in, Chicot, who had once been in his service.

"I heard you were in disgrace," said the Prince.

"You cannot think how sober the Court has become since the death of Henri II."

"And yet the King loves to laugh, surely."

"Which King? Francis II. or Francis of Lorraine?"

"Are you so fearless of the Duke that you speak so?"

"He will not punish me for that, sir," replied Chicot, smiling.

"And to what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Was it not due to you after your coming here? I have brought you my cap and bauble."

"I cannot get out then?"

"Try!"

"And if I do get out?"

"I will confess that you have won the game by playing against the rules."

"Chicot, you frighten me. Have you been sent by some one who is interested in my fate?"

Chicot nodded "Yes." He went nearer to the Prince, and conveyed to him that they were watched and overheard.

"What have you to say to me?" asked Monsieur de Condé.

"That nothing but daring can get you out of the scrape," said the fool, whispering the words into his ear. "And this is from the Queen-mother."

"Tell those who have sent you," replied the Prince, "that I should never have come to this castle if I had anything to blame myself for or to fear."

"I fly to carry your bold reply," said the fool.

Two hours later, at one in the afternoon, before the King's dinner, the chancellor and Cardinal de Tournon came to fetch the Prince to conduct him to Francis II. in the great hall where the Council had sat. There, before all the Court, the Prince de Condé affected surprise at the cool reception the King had given him, and he asked the reason.

"You are accused, cousin," said the Queen-mother sternly, "of having meddled with the plots of the Reformers, and you must prove yourself a faithful subject and a good Catholic if you wish to avert the King's anger from your House."

On hearing this speech, spoken by Catherine in the midst of hushed silence, as she stood with her hand in the King's arm and with the Duc d'Orléans on her left hand, the Prince de Condé drew back three steps, and with an impulse of dignified pride laid his hand on his sword, looking at the persons present.

"Those who say so, madame, lie in their throat!" he exclaimed in angry tones.

He flung his glove at the King's feet, saying—

"Let the man who will maintain this calumny stand forth!"

A shiver ran through the whole Court when the Duc de Guise was seen to quit his place; but instead of picking up the glove as they expected, he went up to the intrepid hunchback.

"If you need a second, Prince, I beg of you to accept my services," said he. "I will answer for you, and will show the Reformers how greatly they deceive themselves if they hope to have you for their leader."

The Prince de Condé could not help offering his hand to the lieutenant-general of the kingdom. Chicot picked up the glove and restored it to Monsieur de Condé.

"Cousin," said the boy-King, "you should never draw your sword but in defense of your country. Come to dinner."

The Cardinal de Lorraine, puzzled by his brother's action, led him off to their rooms. The Prince de Condé having weathered the worst danger, gave his hand to Queen Mary Stewart to lead her to the dining-room; but, while making flattering speeches to the young Queen, he was trying to discern what snare was at this moment being laid for him by the Balafré's policy. In vain he racked his brain, he could not divine the Guises' scheme; but Queen Mary betrayed it.

"It would have been a pity," said she, laughing, "to see so clever a head fall; you must allow that my uncle is magnanimous."

"Yes, madame, for my head fits no shoulders but my own, although one is larger than the other. But is it magnanimity in your uncle? Has he not rather gained credit at a cheap rate? Do you think it such an easy matter to have the law of a Prince of the Blood?"

"We have not done yet," replied she. "We shall see how you behave at the execution of the gentlemen, your friends, over which the Council has determined to make the greatest display."

"I shall do as the King does," said Condé.

"The King, the Queen-mother, and I shall all be present, with all the Court and the ambassadors——"

"Quite a high day?" said the Prince ironically.

"Better than that," said the young Queen, "an *auto-da-fé*,* a function of high political purport. The gentlemen of France must be subjugated by the Crown; they must be cured of their taste for faction and manœuvring——"

"You will not cure them of their warlike temper by showing them their danger, madame, and at this game you risk the Crown itself," replied the Prince.

At the end of this dinner, which was gloomy enough, Queen

* Lit.: Act of Faith—the ceremony of burning heretics.

Mary was so unfortunately daring as to turn the conversation publicly on the trial which the nobles, taken under arms, were at that moment undergoing, and to speak of the necessity for giving the utmost solemnity to their execution.

"But, madame," said Francis II., "is it not enough for the King of France to know that the blood of so many brave gentlemen must be shed? Must it be a cause of triumph?"

"No, sir, but an example," replied Catherine.

"Your grandfather and your father were in the habit of seeing heretics burned," said Mary Stewart.

"The kings who reigned before me went their way," said Francis, "and I mean to go mine."

"Philip II.," Catherine went on, "who is a great king, lately, when he was in the Netherlands, had an *auto-da-fé* postponed till he should have returned to Valladolid."

"What do you think about it, cousin?" said the King to the Prince de Condé.

"Sire, you cannot avoid going; the papal nuncio and the ambassadors must be present. For my part, I am delighted to go if the ladies are to be of the party."

The Prince, at a glance from Catherine de' Medici, had boldly taken his line.

While the Prince de Condé was being admitted to the Castle of Amboise, the furrier to the two Queens was also arriving from Paris, brought thither by the uneasiness produced by the reports of the rebellion, not only in himself and his family, but also in the Lalliers.

At the gate of the castle, when the old man craved admission, the captain of the Guard, at the words "Queen's furrier," answered at once—

"My good man, if you want to be hanged, you have only to set foot in the courtyard."

On hearing this the unhappy father sat down on a rail a little way off, to wait till some attendant on either of the Queens, or some woman of the Court, should pass him,

to ask for some news of his son; but he remained there the whole day without seeing anybody he knew, and was at last obliged to go down into the town, where he found a lodging, not without difficulty, in an inn on the square where the executions were to take place. He was obliged to pay a livre a day (then a very large sum) to secure a room looking out on the square.

On the following day he was brave enough to look on from his window at the rebels who had been condemned to the wheel, or to be hanged, as men of minor importance; and the Syndic of the Furriers' Guild was glad enough not to find his son among the sufferers.

When it was all over, he went to place himself in the clerk's way. Having mentioned his name and pressed a purse full of crown-pieces into the man's hands, he begged him to see whether, in the three former days of execution, the name of Christophe Lecamus had occurred. The registrar, touched by the despairing old father's manners and tone of voice, conducted him to his own house. After carefully comparing notes, he could assure the old man that the said Christophe was not among those who had hitherto been executed, nor was he named among those who were to die within the next few days.

"My dear master," said the clerk to the furrier, "the Parlement is now engaged in trying the lords and gentlemen concerned in the business, and the principal leaders. So, possibly, your son is imprisoned in the castle, and will be one in the magnificent execution for which my lords the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine are making great preparations. Twenty-seven barons are to be beheaded, with eleven counts and seven marquises, fifty gentlemen in all, and leaders of the Reformers. As the administration of justice in Touraine has no connection with that of the Paris Parlement, if you positively must have some news of your son, go to my lord the Chancellor Olivier, who, by the orders of the lieutenant-

general of the kingdom, has the management of the proceedings."

Three times did the poor old man go to the chancellor's house and stand in a file of people in the courtyard in common with an immense number of people who had come to pray for their relations' lives; but as titled folk were admitted before the middle-class, he was obliged to give up all hope of speaking with the chancellor, though he saw him several times coming out of his house to go either to the château or to the Commission appointed by the Parlement, along a way cleared for him by soldiers, between two hedges of petitioners who were thrust aside.

It was a dreadful scene of misery, for among this crowd were wives, daughters, and mothers, whole families in tears. Old Lecamus gave a great deal of gold to the servants at the castle, enjoining on them that they should deliver certain letters he wrote to la Dayelle, Queen Mary's waiting-woman, or to the Queen-mother's woman; but the lackeys took the goodman's money, and then, by the cardinal's orders, handed all letters to the provost of the Law Court. As a consequence of their unprecedented cruelty, the Princes of Lorraine had cause to fear revenge: and they never took greater precautions than during the stay of the Court at Amboise, so that neither the most effectual bribery, that of gold, nor the most diligent inquiries brought the furrier any light as to his son's fate. He wandered about the little town in a melancholy way, watching the tremendous preparations that the cardinal was making for the shocking spectacle at which the Prince de Condé was to be present.

Public curiosity was being stimulated, by every means in use at the time, from Paris to Nantes. The execution had been announced from the pulpit by every preacher, in a breath with the King's victory over the heretics.

Three elegant stands, the centre one apparently to be the finest of the three, were being erected against the curtain-wall

of the castle, at the foot of which the execution was to take place. All around the open space raised wooden seats were being put up, after the fashion of an amphitheatre, to accommodate the enormous crowd attracted by the notoriety of this *auto-da-fè*. About ten thousand persons were camping out in the fields on the day before this hideous spectacle. The roofs were crowded with spectators, and windows were let for as much as ten livres, an enormous sum at that time.

The unhappy father had, as may be supposed, secured one of the best places for commanding a view of the square where so many men of family were to perish, on a huge scaffold erected in the middle, and covered with black cloth. On the morning of the fatal day, the headsman's block, on which the victim laid his head, kneeling in front of it, was placed on the scaffold, and an armchair, hung with black, for the recorder of the Court, whose duty it was to call the condemned by name and read their sentence. The inclosure was guarded from early morning by the Scotch soldiers and the men-at-arms of the King's household, to keep the crowd out till the hour of the executions.

After a solemn mass in the chapel of the castle and in every church in the town, the gentlemen were led forth, the last survivors of all the conspirators. These men, some of whom had been through the torture chamber, were collected round the foot of the scaffold, and exhorted by monks, who strove to persuade them to renounce the doctrines of Calvin. But not one would listen to these preachers, turned on to them by the Cardinal de Lorraine, among whom, no doubt, these gentlemen feared that there might be some spies on behalf of the Guises.

To escape being persecuted with these exhortations, they began to sing a psalm turned into French verse by Clément Marot. Calvin, as is well known, had decreed that God should be worshiped in the mother-tongue of every country, from motives of commonsense as well as from antagonism to

the Roman Church. It was a pathetic moment for all those among the throng, who felt for these gentlemen, when they heard this verse sung at the moment when the Court appeared on the scene—

"Lord, help us in our need!
Lord, bless us with Thy grace!
And on the saints in sore distress
Let shine Thy glorious face!"

The eyes of the Reformers all centred on the Prince de Condé, who was intentionally placed between Queen Mary and the Duc d'Orléans. Queen Catherine de' Medici sat next her son, with the cardinal on her left. The papal nuncio stood behind the two Queens. The lieutenant-general of the kingdom was on horseback, below the royal stand, with two marshals of France and his captains. As soon as the Prince de Condé appeared, all the gentlemen sentenced to death, to whom he was known, bowed to him, and the brave hunchback returned the salutation.

"It is hard," said he to the Duc d'Orléans, "not to be civil to men who are about to die."

The two other grand stands were filled by invited guests, by courtiers, and the attendants on their majesties; in short, the rank and fashion of the castle from Blois, who thus rushed from festivities to executions, just as they afterward rushed from the pleasures of Court life to the perils of war, with a readiness which to foreigners will always be one of the mainsprings of their policy in France. The poor Syndic of the Furriers' Guild felt the keenest joy at failing to discern his son among the fifty or so gentlemen condemned to death.

At a signal from the Duc de Guise, the clerk, from the top of the scaffold, called out at once, in a loud voice—

"Jean-Louis-Albéric, Baron de Raunay, guilty of heresy, of the crime of high treason, and of bearing arms against the King's majesty."

A tall, handsome man mounted the scaffold with a firm step, bowed to the people and to the Court, and said—

"The indictment is false; I bore arms to deliver the King from his enemies of Lorraine!"

He laid his head on the block, and it fell.

The Reformers sang—

"Thou, Lord, hast proved our faith
And searched our soul's desire,
And purified our froward hearts,
As silver proved by fire."

"Robert-Jean-René Briquemaut, Comte de Villemongis, guilty of high treason and rebellion against the King," cried the recorder.

The Count dipped his hands in the Baron de Raunay's blood, and said—

"May this blood be on the heads of those who are truly guilty!"

The Reformers sang on—

"Thou, Lord, hast led our feet
Where foes had laid their snare;
To Thee, O Lord, the glory be,
Though we should perish there."

"Confess, my lord nuncio," said the Prince de Condé, "that if French gentlemen know how to plot, they also know how to die."

"What hatred you are entailing on the heads of your children, brother," said the Duchesse de Guise to the Cardinal de Lorraine.

"The sight makes me feel sick," said the young King, who had turned pale at the sight of all this bloodshed.

"Pooh! Rebels!" said Catherine de' Medici.

Still the hymn went on, still the axe was plied. At last the

sublime spectacle of men who could die singing, and, above all, the impression produced on the crowd by the gradual dwindling of the voices, became stronger than the terror inspired by the Guises.

"Mercy!" cried the mob, when they heard at last only the feeble chant of a single victim, reserved till the last, as being the most important.

He was standing alone at the foot of the steps leading up to the scaffold, and sang—

> "Lord, help us in our need!
> Lord, bless us with Thy grace!
> And on the saints in sore distress
> Let shine Thy glorious face!"

"Come, Duc de Nemours," said the Prince de Condé, who was tired of his position; "you to whom the securing of the victory is due, and who helped to entrap all these people —do you not feel that you ought to ask the life of this one? It is Castelnau, who, as I was told, had your promise for courteous treatment when he surrendered——"

"Did I wait to see him here before trying to save him?" said the Duc de Nemours, stung by this bitter reproof.

The clerk spoke slowly, intentionally, no doubt—

"Michel-Jean-Louis, Baron de Castelnau-Chalosse, accused and convicted of the crime of high treason and of fighting against his majesty the King."

"No," retorted Castelnau haughtily; "it can be no crime to oppose the tyranny and intended usurpation of the Guises!"

The headsman, who was tired, seeing some stir in the royal seats, rested on his axe.

"Monsieur le Baron," said he, "I should be glad not to hurt you. One minute may perhaps save you."

And all the people shouted again for mercy.

"Come," said the King, "a pardon for poor Castelnau, who saved the Duc d'Orléans."

The base cardinal intentionally misinterpreted the word "Come." He nodded to the executioner, and Castelnau's head fell at the very moment when the King pronounced his pardon.

"That one goes to your account, cardinal," said Catherine.

On the day after this horrible massacre, the Prince de Condé set out for Navarre.

This affair made a great sensation throughout France and in every foreign Court. The torrents of noble blood then shed caused the Chancellor Olivier such deep grief that this admirable judge, seeing the end at which the Guises were aiming, felt that he was not strong enough to hold his own against them. Although they had made him what he was, he would not sacrifice his duty and the Monarchy to them; he retired from public life, suggesting that l'Hôpital should be his successor. Catherine, on hearing of Olivier's choice, proposed Birague for the post of chancellor, and urged her request with great pertinacity. The wily cardinal, who knew nothing of the note written to Catherine by l'Hôpital, and who believed him still faithful to the House of Lorraine, upheld him as Birague's rival, and the Queen-mother affected to be overridden.

L'Hôpital was no sooner appointed than he took steps to prevent the introduction into France of the holy office (Inquisition), which the Cardinal de Lorraine wished to establish; and he so effectually opposed the anti-Gallican measures and policy of the Guises, and showed himself so sturdy a Frenchman, that within three months of his appointment he was exiled, to reduce his spirit, to his estate of le Vignay, near Etampes.

Old Lecamus impatiently waited till the Court should leave Amboise, for he could find no opportunity of speaking to either Queen Mary or Queen Catherine; but he hoped to be able to place himself in their way at the time when the Court should be moving along the river-bank on the way back to

Blois. The furrier dressed himself as a poor man, at the risk of being seized as a spy, and, favored by this disguise, he mingled with the beggars who stood by the wayside.

After the departure of the Prince de Condé, the Duke and the cardinal thought that they had silenced the Reformed party, and they left the Queen-mother a little more liberty. Lecamus knew that Catherine, instead of traveling in a litter, liked to ride on horseback on a *planchette*, as it was called, a side-saddle with a foot-rest. This sort of stirrup was invented by or for Catherine, who, having hurt her leg, rested both feet on a velvet sling, sitting sideways, and supporting one knee in a hollow cut in the saddle. As the Queen had very fine legs, she was accused of having hit on this device for displaying them.

Thus the old man was able to place himself in sight of the Queen-mother; but when she saw him she affected anger.

"Go away from hence, good man, and let no one see you speaking to me," she said with some anxiety. "Get yourself appointed delegate to the States-General from the corporation of Paris Guilds, and be on my side in the Assembly at Orleans, you will then hear something definite about your son——"

"Is he alive?" said the old man.

"Alas!" said the Queen, "I hope it."

And Lecamus was obliged to return home with this sad reply and the secret as to the convocation of the States-General, which the Queen had told him.

Some days before this, the Cardinal de Lorraine had received information as to the guilt of the Court of Navarre. At Lyons, and at Mouvans in Dauphiné, the Reformers, commanded by the most enterprising of the Bourbon princes, had tried to inflame the population. This daring attempt, after the dreadful executions at Amboise, astonished the Guises, who, to put an end to heresy, no doubt, by some means of

which they kept the secret, proposed to assemble the States-General at Orleans. Catherine de' Medici, who saw a support for her own policy in the representation of the nation, consented with joy. The cardinal, who aimed at recapturing his prey and overthrowing the House of Bourbon, convoked the States solely to secure the presence of the Prince de Condé and of the King of Navarre, Antoine de Bourbon, father of Henri IV. He then meant to make use of Christophe to convict the Prince of high treason if he were able once more to get him into the King's power.

After spending two months in the prison of Blois, Christophe one morning was carried out on a litter lying on a mattress, was embarked on a barge, and taken up the river to Orleans before a westerly breeze. He reached that town the same evening, and was taken to the famous tower of Saint-Aignan. Christophe, who knew not what to make of his transfer, had time enough for meditation on his behavior and on his future prospects. There he remained two months more, on his bed, unable to use his legs. His bones were crushed. When he begged to be allowed the help of a surgeon, the gaoler told him that his orders with regard to his prisoner were so strict that he dared not allow any one else even to bring him his food. This severity, of which the effect was absolutely solitary confinement, surprised Christophe. His idea was that he must either be hanged or released; he knew nothing whatever of the events happening at Amboise.

In spite of the secret warnings to remain at home sent to them by Catherine de' Medici, the two chiefs of the House of Bourbon determined to appear at the meeting of the States-General, since autograph letters from the King were reassuring; and when the Court was settling at Orleans, Groslot, the Chancellor of Navarre, announced their advent, to the surprise of all.

Francis II. took up his quarters in the house of the Chan-

cellor of Navarre, who was also the Bailli or Recorder of Orleans. This man Groslot, whose double appointment is one of the odd features of a time when Reformers were in possession of abbeys—Groslot, the Jacques Cœur of Orleans, one of the richest citizens of his day, did not leave his name to his house. It came to be known as the *Bailliage*, having been purchased, no doubt, from his heirs, by the Crown, or by the provincial authorities, to be the seat of that tribunal. This elegant structure, built by the citizens of the sixteenth century, adds a detail to the history of a time when the King, the nobility, and the middle-class vied with each other in wealth, elegance, and splendor; especially in their dwellings —as may be seen at Varangeville, Ango's magnificent manor-house, and the Hôtel d'Hercules, as it is called, in Paris, which still exists, but in a condition that is the despair of archæologists and of lovers of mediæval art.

Those who have been to Orleans can hardly have failed to observe the Town Hall in the Place de l'Estape. This town-hall is the Old Bailli's Court, the Hôtel Groslot, the most illustrious and most neglected house in Orleans.

The remains of this building plainly show to the archæologist's eye how magnificent it must once have been, at a time when citizens built their houses more of wood than of stone, and the upper ranks alone had the right to build manor-houses, a word of special meaning. Since it served as the King's residence at a time when the Court made so much display of pomp and luxury, the Hôtel Groslot must then have been the largest and finest house in Orleans.

It was on the Place de l'Estape that the Guises and the King held a review of the municipal guard, to which Monsieur de Cypierre was nominated captain during the King's visit. At that time, the cathedral of Sainte-Croix—afterward finished by Henry IV., who desired to set the seal to his conversion—was being built, and the surrounding ground, strewn with blocks of stone and encumbered with piles of timber, was held

by the Guises, who lodged in the bishop's palace, now destroyed.

The town was in military occupation, and the measures adopted by the Guises plainly showed how little liberty they intended to give to the States-General, while the delegates flocked into the town and raised the rents of the most wretched lodgings. The Court, the municipal militia, the nobles, and the citizens all alike expected some *Coup d'État;* and their expectations were fulfilled when the Princes of the Blood arrived.

As soon as the two Princes entered the King's room, the Court saw with dismay how insolent was the behavior of the Cardinal de Lorraine, who, to assert his audacious pretensions, kept his head covered, while the King of Navarre before him was beheaded. Catherine de' Medici stood with downcast eyes, not to betray her indignation. A solemn explanation then took place between the young King and the two heads of the younger branch. It was brief, for at the first words spoken by the Prince de Condé, Francis II. closed the discussion by saying—

"My lords and cousins, I fancied the incident of Amboise was at an end; it is not so, and we shall see cause to regret our indulgence!"

"It is not the King who speaks thus," said the Prince de Condé, "but Messieurs de Guise."

"Good-day, monsieur," said the little King, crimson with rage.

As he went through the great hall, the Prince was stopped by the two captains of the Guards. When the officer of the French Guard stepped forward, the Prince took a letter out of the breast of his doublet and said, in the presence of all the Court—

"Can you read me this, Monsieur de Maillé-Brézé?"

"With pleasure," said the French captain to the Prince de Condé.

"'Cousin, come in all security; I give you my royal word that you may. If you need a safe-conduct, these presents will serve you.'"

"And signed——?" said the bold and mischievous hunchback.

"Signed 'François,'" said Maillé.

"Nay, nay," replied the Prince, "it is signed 'Your good cousin and friend, François!' Gentlemen," he went on, turning to the Scotch Guard, "I will follow you to the prison whither you are to escort me by the King's orders. There is enough noble spirit, no doubt, in this room to fully understand that."

The utter silence that reigned in the room might have enlightened the Guises, but silence is the last thing that princes listen to.

"Monseigneur," said the Cardinal de Tournon, who was following the Prince, "since the day at Amboise you have taken steps in opposition to royal authority at Lyons and at Mouvans in Dauphiné—things of which the King knew nothing when he addressed you in those terms."

"Rascals!" cried the Prince, laughing.

"You made a public declaration against the mass and in favor of heresy——"

"We are masters in Navarre," said the Prince.

"In Béarn, you mean! But you owe homage to the Crown," replied the Président de Thou.

"Ah, you are here, president!" exclaimed the Prince ironically. "And is all the Parlement with you?"

With these words, the Prince flashed a look of contempt at the cardinal and left the room; he understood that his head was in peril.

On the following day, when Messieurs de Thou, de Viole, d'Espesse, Bourdin, the public prosecutor, and du Tillet, the chief clerk, came into the prison, he kept them standing, and

expressed his regrets at seeing them engaged on a business which did not concern them; then he said to the clerk—

"Write."

And he dictated as follows:

"I, Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, peer of the realm, Marquis de Conti, Comte de Soissons, Prince of the Blood of France, formally refuse to recognize any Commission appointed to try me, inasmuch as that by virtue of my rank and the privileges attaching to every member of the royal family, I can only be attainted, heard, and judged by a Parlement of all the peers in their places, the Chambers in full assembly, and the King seated on the bed of justice. You ought to know this better than any one, gentlemen, and this is all you will get of me. For the rest, I trust in God and my Right."

The magistrates proceeded nevertheless, in spite of the determined silence of the Prince.

The King of Navarre was at liberty, but closely watched; his prison was a wider one than the Prince's, and that was the whole difference between his position and his brother's; for the heads of the King and the Prince were to be felled at the same time.

So Christophe was so closely confined by order of the cardinal and the lieutenant-general of the kingdom only to afford proof to the judges of the Prince's guilt. The letters found on the person of La Sagne, the Prince's secretary, intelligible to a statesman, were not clear enough for the judges. The cardinal had thought of bringing the Prince accidentally face to face with Christophe, who had been placed, not without a purpose, in a lower room of the tower of Saint-Aignan, and the window looked out on the yard. Each time he was examined by the magistrates, Christophe intrenched himself in systematic denial, which naturally prolonged the affair till the meeting of the States-General.

Lecamus, who had made a point of getting himself elected by the citizens of Paris as a deputy for the "Third Estate,"

came to Orleans a few days after the Prince's arrest. This event, of which he had news at Etampes, increased his alarms, for he understood—he who alone in the world knew of his son's interview with the Prince under the Pont au Change—that Christophe's fate was bound up with that of the rashly daring head of the Reformation party. So he determined to study the mysterious interests which had become so entangled at Court since the States had met, so as to hit upon some plan for rescuing his son. It was vain to think of having recourse to Queen Catherine, who refused to receive the furrier. No one of the Court to whom he had access could give him any satisfactory information with regard to Christophe, and he had sunk to such depths of despair that he was about to address himself to the cardinal, when he heard that Monsieur de Thou had accepted the office of one of the judges of the Prince de Condé—a blot on the good fame of that great jurist. The Syndic went to call on his son's patron, and learned that Christophe was alive but a prisoner.

Tourillon, the glover, to whose house la Renaudie had sent Christophe, had offered a room to the Sieur Lecamus for the whole time during which the States-General should be sitting. He believed the furrier to be, like himself, secretly attached to the Reformed religion; but he soon perceived that a father who fears for his son's life thinks no more of shades of religious dogma; he throws himself soul and body on the mercy of God, never thinking of the badge he wears before men.

The old man, repulsed at every attempt, wandered half-witless about the streets. Against all his expectations, his gold was of no avail; Monsieur de Thou had warned him that even if he should bribe some servant of the Guise household, he would only be so much out of pocket, for the Duke and the cardinal allowed nothing to be known concerning Christophe. This judge, whose fair fame is somewhat tarnished by the part he played at this juncture, had tried to give the unhappy father some hope; but he himself trembled for his god-

son's life, and his consolations only added to the furrier's alarm. The old man was always prowling round the house; in three months he grew quite thin.

His only hope now lay in the warm friendship which had so long bound him to the Hippocrates of the sixteenth century. Ambroise Paré tried to say a word to Queen Mary as he came out of the King's room; but the instant he mentioned Christophe, the daughter of the Stewarts, annoyed by the prospect before her in the event of any ill befalling the King, whom she believed to have been poisoned by the Reformers, as he had been taken suddenly ill, replied—

"If my uncles would take my opinion, such a fanatic would have been hanged before now."

On the evening when this ominous reply had been repeated to Lecamus by his friend Paré, on the Place de l'Estape, he went home half-dead, and retired to his room, refusing to eat any supper.

Tourillon, very uneasy, went upstairs, and found the old man in tears; and as the poor furrier's feeble eyes showed the reddened and wrinkled linings of the lids, the glover believed that they were tears of blood.

"Be comforted, father," said the Huguenot, "the citizens of Orleans are enraged at seeing their town treated as if it had been taken by assault, and guarded by Monsieur de Cypierre's soldiery. If the Prince de Condé's life should be in danger, we should very soon demolish the tower of Saint-Aignan, for the whole town is on the Reformers' side, and would rise in rebellion, you may be quite certain."

"But even if the Guises were seized, would their death give me back my son?" said the unhappy father.

At this instant there was a timid rap at the outer door; Tourillon went down to open it. It was quite dark. In these troubled times the master of every household took elaborate precautions. Tourillon looked out through the bars of a wicket in the door and saw a stranger, whose accent be-

trayed him as an Italian. This man, dressed in black, asked to see Lecamus on matters of business, and Tourillon showed him in. At the sight of the stranger the old furrier quaked visibly, but the visitor had time to lay a finger on his lips. Lecamus, understanding the gesture, immediately said—

"You have come to offer furs for sale, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the stranger in Italian, with an air of privity.

This man was, in fact, the famous Ruggieri, the Queen-mother's astrologer. Tourillon went downstairs, perceiving that he was not wanted.

"Where can we talk without fear of being overheard?" said the astute Florentine.

"Only in the open fields," replied Lecamus. "But we shall not be allowed out of the town; you know how strictly the gates are guarded. No one can pass out without an order from Monsieur de Cypierre, not even a member of the Assembly like myself. Indeed, at to-morrow's sitting we all intend to complain of this restriction on our liberty."

"Work like a mole, never let your paws be seen in any kind of business," replied the wily Florentine. "To-morrow will no doubt be a decisive day. From my calculations, to-morrow, or soon after, you will, perhaps, see your son."

"God grant it! Though you are said to deal only with the devil!"

"Come and see me at home," said the astrologer, smiling. "I watch the stars from the tower belonging to the Sieur Touchet du Beauvais, the lieutenant of the bailiwick, whose daughter has found favor in the eyes of the little Duc d'Orléans. I have cast the girl's horoscope, and it does in fact portend that she will become a great lady and be loved by a king. The lieutenant is a clever fellow, he is interested in science, and the Queen found me lodgings with the good man, who is cunning enough to be a rabid Guisard till Charles IX. comes to the throne."

The furrier and the astrologer made their way to the Sieur de Beauvais' house without being seen or interfered with; and, in the event of Lecamus being discovered, Ruggieri meant to afford him a pretext in his desire to consult the astrologer as to his son's fate.

When they had climbed to the top of the turret where the astrologer had established himself, Lecamus said—

"Then my son is really alive?"

"At present," said the Italian. "But we must make haste to save him. Remember, O seller of skins, that I would not give two farthings for yours if in the whole course of your life you breathe one word of what I am about to tell you."

"The warning is not needed, master. I have been furrier to the Court since the time of the late King Louis XII., and this is the fourth reign I have lived under."

"And you may soon say the fifth," replied Ruggieri.

"What do you know of my son?"

"Well, he has been through the torture chamber."

"Poor boy!" sighed the old man, looking up to heaven.

"His knees and ankles are a little damaged, but he has gained royal protection, which will be over him as long as he lives," the Florentine added, on seeing the father's horror. "Your little Christophe has done good service to our great Queen Catherine. If we can get your son out of the clutches of the cardinal, you will see him councilor in the Parlement yet. And a man would let his bones be broken three times over to find himself in the good graces of that beloved sovereign—a real genius she, who will triumph over every obstacle.

"I have cast the horoscope of the Duc de Guise; he will be killed within a year. Come now, Christophe did meet the Prince de Condé——"

"You know the future, do you not know the past?" the furrier put in.

"I am not questioning you, I am informing you, goodman. Well, your son will be placed to-morrow where the Prince

will pass by. If he recognizes him, or if the Prince recognizes your son, Monsieur de Condé forfeits his head. As to what would become of his accomplice—God only knows! But be easy. Neither your son nor the Prince is doomed to die; I have read their destiny; they will live. But by what means they may escape I know not. Now we will do what we can, apart from the certainty of my calculations. Monsieur de Condé shall get a prayer-book to-morrow, delivered to him by a safe hand, in which he shall find a warning! God grant that your son may be secretive, for he can have no warning! And a mere flash of recognition would cost the Prince his life. Thus, although the Queen-mother has every reason to depend on Christophe's fidelity——"

"He has been put to cruel tests," cried the furrier.

"Do not speak in that way. Do you suppose that the Queen is dancing for joy? She is indeed going to take her measures exactly as though the Guises had decided on the Prince's death; and she is wise, that shrewd and prudent Queen! Now she counts on you to help her in every way. You have some influence in the 'Third Estate,' where you are the representative of the Guilds of Paris; and, even if the Guisards should promise to set your son at liberty, try to deceive them and stir up your class against the Princes of Lorraine. Vote for the Queen-mother as Regent; the King of Navarre will give his assent to that publicly, to-morrow, in the Assembly."

"But the King?"

"The King will die," said Ruggieri; "I have read it in the stars. What the Queen requires of you in the Assembly is very simple; but she needs a greater service from you than that. You maintained the great Ambroise Paré while he was a student; you are his friend——"

"Ambroise loves the Duc de Guise in these days better than he loves me," said the furrier. "And he is right; he owes his place to him. Still, he is faithful to the King. And,

although he has a leaning toward the Reformation, he will do nothing but his duty."

"A plague on all honest men!" cried the Florentine. "Ambroise boasted this evening that he could pull the little King through. If the King recovers his health, the Guises must triumph, the Princes are dead men, the House of Bourbon is extinct, we go back to Florence, your son is hanged, and the Guises will make short work of the rest of the royal family——"

"Great God!" cried Lecamus.

"Do not exclaim in that way; it is like a citizen who knows nothing of Court manners; but go forthwith to Ambroise, and find out what he means to do to save the King. If it seems at all certain, come and tell me what the operation is in which he has such faith."

"But——" Lecamus began.

"Obey me blindly, my good friend, otherwise you will be dazed."

"He is right," thought the furrier.

And he went off to the King's surgeon, who lived in an inn in the Place du Martroi.

At this juncture Catherine de' Medici found herself, politically speaking, in the same extremities as she had been in when Christophe had seen her at Blois. Though she had inured herself to the struggle and had exerted her fine intellect in that first defeat, her situation, though precisely the same now as then, was even more critical and dangerous than at the time of the riots at Amboise. Events had grown in magnitude, and the Queen had grown with them. Though she seemed to proceed in agreement with the Princes of Lorraine, Catherine held the threads of a conspiracy skillfully plotted against her terrible associates, and was only waiting for a favorable moment to drop her mask.

The cardinal had just found himself deceived by Catherine.

The crafty Italian had seen in the younger branch of the royal family an obstacle she could use to check the pretensions of the Guises; and, in spite of the counsel of the two Gondis, who advised her to leave the Guises to act with what violence they could against the Bourbons, she had, by warning the Queen of Navarre, brought to naught the plot to seize Béarn concerted by the Guises with the King of Spain. As this State secret was known only to themselves and to Catherine, the Princes of Lorraine were assured of her betrayal, and they wished to send her back to Florence; but to secure proofs of Catherine's treachery to the State—the House of Lorraine was the State—the Duke and cardinal had just made her privy to their scheme for making away with the King of Navarre.

The precautions which were immediately taken by Antoine de Bourbon proved to the brothers that this secret, known but to three people, had been divulged by the Queen-mother. The Cardinal de Lorraine accused Catherine of her breach of faith in the presence of the King, threatening her with banishment if any fresh indiscretions on her part should imperil the State. Catherine, seeing herself in imminent danger, was compelled to act as a high-handed sovereign. She gave ample proof indeed of her fine abilities, but it must also be confessed that she was well served by the friends she trusted.

L'Hôpital sent her a letter in these terms:

"Do not allow a Prince of the Blood to be killed by a committee, or you will soon be carried off yourself."

Catherine sent Birague to le Vignay, desiring the chancellor to come to the Assembly of the States-General, although he was in banishment. Birague returned the same evening with l'Hôpital, halting within three leagues of Orleans, and the chancellor thus declared himself on the side of the Queen-mother.

Chiverni, whose fidelity was with good reason regarded as doubtful by the Guises, had fled from Orleans, and by a forced march, which was nearly his death, he reached Écouen in ten hours. He there told the Connétable de Montmorency of the danger his nephew the Prince de Condé was in, and of the encroachments of the Guises. Anne de Montmorency, furious at learning that the Prince owed his life merely to the sudden illness of which Francis II. was dying, marched up with fifteen hundred horse and a hundred gentlemen under arms. The more effectually to surprise the Guises, he had avoided Paris, coming from Écouen to Corbeil, and from Corbeil to Pithiviers by the valley of the Essonne.

"Man to man, and both to pull, leaves to each but little wool!" he said, on the occasion of this dashing advance.

Anne de Montmorency, who had been the preserver of France when Charles V. invaded Provence, and the Duc de Guise, who had checked the Emperor's second attempt at Metz, were, in fact, the two greatest French warriors of their time.

Catherine had waited for the right moment to stir up the hatred of the man whom the Guises had overthrown. The Marquis de Simeuse, in command of the town of Gien, on hearing of the advance of so considerable a force as the connétable brought with him, sprang to horse, hoping to warn the Duke in time. The Queen-mother, meanwhile, certain that the connétable would come to his nephew's rescue and confident of the chancellor's devotion to the royal cause, had fanned the hopes and encouraged the spirit of the Reformed party. The Colignys and the adherents of the imperiled House of Bourbon had made common cause with the Queen-mother's partisans; a coalition between various antagonistic interests, attacked by a common foe, was silently formed in the Assembly of the States, where the question was boldly broached of making Catherine Regent of France in the event of the young King's death. Catherine herself,

whose faith in astrology was far greater than her belief in church dogmas, had ventured to extremes against her foes when she saw her son dying at the end of the time fixed as his term of life by the famous soothsayer brought to the château de Chaumont by Nostradamus.

A few days before the terrible close of his reign, Francis II. had chosen to go out on the Loire, so as not to be in the town at the hour of the Prince de Condé's intended execution. Having surrendered the Prince's head to the Cardinal de Lorraine, he feared a riot quite as much as he dreaded the supplications of the Princesse de Condé. As he was embarking, a fresh breeze, such as often sweeps the Loire at the approach of winter, gave him so violent an earache that he was forced to return home; he went to bed, never to leave it alive.

In spite of the disagreement of the physicians, who, all but Chapelain, were his enemies and opponents, Ambroise Paré maintained that an abscess had formed in the head, and that if no outlet were pierced the chances of the King's death were greater every day.

In spite of the late hour and the rigorous enforcement of the curfew at that time in Orleans, which was ruled as in a state of siege, Paré's lamp was shining in his window where he was studying. Lecamus called to him from below; and when he had announced his name, the surgeon gave orders that his old friend should be admitted.

"You give yourself no rest, Ambroise, and while saving the lives of others you will wear out your own," said the furrier as he went in.

Indeed, there sat the surgeon, his books open, his instruments lying about, and before him a skull not long since buried, dug up from the grave, and perforated.

"I must save the King."

"Then you are very sure you can, Ambroise?" said the old man, shuddering.

"As sure as I am alive. The King, my good old friend, has some evil humor festering on his brain, which will fill it up, and the danger is pressing; but by piercing the skull I let the matter out and free his head. I have already performed this operation three times; it was invented by a Piedmontese, and I have been so lucky as to improve upon it. The first time it was at the siege of Metz, on Monsieur de Pienne, whom I got out of the scrape, and who has only been all the wiser for it; the second time it saved the life of a poor man on whom I wished to test the certainty of this daring operation to which Monsieur de Pienne had submitted; the third time was on a gentleman in Paris, who is now perfectly well. Trepanning—for that is the name given to it—is as yet little known. The sufferers object to it on the score of the imperfection of the instrument, but that I have been able to improve. So now I am experimenting on this head, to be sure of not failing to-morrow on the King's."

"You must be very sure of yourself, for your head will be in danger if you——"

"I will wager my life that he is cured," replied Paré, with the confidence of genius. "Oh, my good friend, what is it to make a hole in a skull with due care? It is what soldiers do every day with no care at all."

"But do you know, my boy," said the citizen, greatly daring, "that if you save the King, you ruin France? Do you know that your instrument will place the crown of the Valois on the head of a Prince of Lorraine, calling himself the direct heir of Charlemagne? Do you know that surgery and politics are, at this moment, at daggers drawn? Yes, the triumph of your genius will be the overthrow of your religion. If the Guises retain the Regency, the blood of the Reformers will flow in streams! Be a great citizen rather than a great surgeon, and sleep through to-morrow morning, leaving the King's room free to those leeches who, if they do not save the King, will save France."

"I!" cried Paré. "I—leave a man to die when I can cure him? Never! If I am to be hanged for a Calvinist, I will go to the castle, all the same, right early to-morrow. Do you not know that the only favor I mean to ask, when I have savedt he King, is your Christophe's life? That will surely be a moment when Queen Mary can refuse me nothing."

"Alas, my friend, has not the little King already refused the Princesse de Condé any pardon for her husband? Do not kill your religion by enabling the man to live who ought to die."

"Are you going to puzzle yourself by trying to find out how God means to dispose of things in the future?" asked Paré. "Honest folk have but one motto—'Do your duty, come what may.' I did this at Calais when I set my foot on the Grand Master; I risked being cut down by all his friends and attendants, and here I am, surgeon to the King; I am a Reformer, and yet I can call the Guises my friends. I will save the King!" cried the surgeon, with the sacred enthusiasm of conviction that genius knows, "and God will take care of France!"

There was a knock at the door, and a few minutes later one of Ambroise Paré's servants gave a note to Lecamus, who read aloud these ominous words:

"A scaffold is being erected at the Convent of the Récollets for the beheading of the Prince de Condé to-morrow."

Ambroise and Lecamus looked at each other, both overpowered with horror.

"I will go and make sure," said the furrier, bidding Ambroise Paré adieu.

Out on the square, Ruggieri took Lecamus by the arm, asking what was Paré's secret for saving the King; but the old man, fearing some treachery, insisted on going to see the scaffold. So the astrologer and the furrier went together

to the Récollets, where, in fact, they found carpenters at work by torchlight.

"Heyday, my friend," said old Lecamus to one of them; "what business is this?"

"We are preparing to hang some heretics, since the bleeding at Amboise did not cure them," said a young friar, who was superintending the workmen.

"Monseigneur the cardinal does well," replied the prudent Ruggieri. "But in my country we do even better."

"What do you do?"

"We burn them, brother."

Lecamus was obliged to lean on the astrologer; his legs refused to carry him, for he thought that his son might next day be swinging on one of those gibbets. The poor old man stood between two sciences—astrology and medicine; each promised to save his son, for whom the scaffold was visibly rising. In this confusion of mind he was as wax in the hands of the Florentine.

"Well, my most respectable vendor of furs, what have you to say to these pleasantries of Lorraine?" asked Ruggieri.

"Woe the day! You know I would give my own skin to see my boy's safe and sound."

"That is what I call talking like a skinner," replied the Italian. "But if you will explain to me the operation that Ambroise proposes to perform on the King, I will guarantee your son's life."

"Truly?" cried the old furrier.

"What shall I swear by?" said Ruggieri.

On this the unhappy old man repeated his conversation with Paré to the Italian, who was off, leaving the disconsolate father in the road the instant he had heard the great surgeon's secret.

"Whom the devil does he mean mischief to?" cried Lecamus, as he saw Ruggieri running at his utmost speed toward the Place de l'Estape.

Lecamus knew nothing of the terrible scene which was going on by the King's bedside, and which had led to the order being given for the erection of the scaffold for the Prince, who had been sentenced in default, as it were, though his execution was postponed for the moment by the King's illness.

There was no one in the hall, on the stairs, or in the court-yard of the bailiff's house but those on actual duty. The crowd of courtiers had resorted to the lodgings of the King of Navarre, who, by the law of the land, was Regent. The French nobles, terrified indeed by the insolence of the Guises, felt an impulse to close their ranks around the chief of the younger branch, seeing that the Queen-mother was subservient to the Guises, and not understanding her Italian policy. Antoine de Bourbon, faithful to his secret compact with Catherine, was not to renounce his claim to the Regency in her favor until the States-General should have voted on the question.

This absolute desertion had struck the Grand Master when, on his return from a walk through the town—as a precautionary measure—he found no one about the King but the friends dependent on his fortunes. The room where Francis II.'s bed had been placed adjoins the great hall of the bailiff's residence, and was at that time lined with oak paneling. The ceiling, formed of narrow boards, skillfully adjusted and painted, showed an arabesque pattern in blue on a gold ground, and a piece of it, pulled down about fifty years ago, has been preserved by a collector of antiquities. This room, hung with tapestry and the floor covered with carpet, was so dark that the burning tapers scarcely gave it light. The enormous bedstead, with four columnar posts and silk curtains, looked like a tomb. On one side of the bed, by the King's pillow, were Queen Mary and the Cardinal de Lorraine; on the other sat Catherine in an armchair. The physician-in-ordinary, the famous Jean Chapelain, afterward

in attendance on Charles IX., was standing by the fireplace. Perfect silence reigned.

The young King, pale and slight, lost in the sheets, was hardly to be seen, with his small, puckered face on the pillow. The Duchesse de Guise, seated on a stool, was supporting Mary Stewart; and near Catherine, in a window recess, Madame de Fieschi was watching the Queen-mother's looks and gestures, for she fully understood the great peril of her position.

In the great hall, notwithstanding the late hour, Monsieur de Cypierre, the Duc d'Orléans' tutor, appointed to be governor of the town, occupied a chimney-corner with the two Gondis. Cardinal de Tournon, who at this crisis had taken part with Queen Catherine, on finding himself treated as an inferior by the Cardinal de Lorraine, whose equal he undoubtedly was in the church, was conversing in a low voice with the brothers Gondi. The Maréchal de Vieilleville and Monsieur de Saint-André, keeper of the seals, were discussing in whispers the imminent danger of the Guises.

The Duc de Guise crossed the hall, glancing hastily about him, and bowed to the Duc d'Orléans, whom he recognized.

"Monseigneur," said he, "this may give you a lesson in the knowledge of men. The Catholic nobility of the kingdom have crowded round a heretic prince, believing that the States assembled will place the Regency in the hands of the heir to the traitor who so long kept your illustrious grandfather a prisoner."

And after this speech, which was calculated to make a deep impression on a prince's mind, he went into the bedroom where the young King was lying, not so much asleep as heavily drowsy. As a rule, the Duc de Guise had the art of overcoming, by his affable expression, the sinister appearance of his scarred features; but at this moment he could not force a smile, seeing the instrument of power quite broken. The cardinal, whose civic courage was equal to his brother's mili-

tary valor, came forward a step or two to meet the lieutenant-general.

"Robertet believes that little Pinard has been bought over by the Queen-mother," he said in his ear, as he led him back into the hall. "He has been made use of to work on the members of the Assembly."

"Bah! what matters our being betrayed by a secretary, when there is treason everywhere?" cried the Duke. "The town is for the Reformers, and we are on the eve of a revolt. Yes! the *Guépins* are malcontents," he added, giving the people of Orleans their common nickname, "and if Paré cannot save the King, we shall see a desperate outbreak. Before long we shall have to lay siege to Orleans, which is a vermin's nest of Huguenots."

"In the last minute," said the cardinal, "I have been watching that Italian woman, who sits there without a spark of feeling. She is waiting for her son's death, God forgive her! I wonder whether it would not be well to arrest her and the King of Navarre too."

"It is more than enough to have the Prince de Condé in prison," replied the Duke.

The sound of a horse ridden at top-speed came up from the gate. The two Princes went to the window, and, by the light of the gatekeeper's torch and of the cresset that was always burning under the gateway, the Duke recognized in the rider's hat the famous cross of Lorraine, which the cardinal had made the badge of their partisans. He sent one of the men-at-arms, who stood in the anteroom, to say that the new-comer was to be admitted; and he went to the head of the stairs to meet him, followed by his brother.

"What is the news, my dear Simeuse?" asked the Duke, with the charming manner he always had for a soldier, as he recognized the Commandant of Gien.

"The connétable is entering Pithiviers; he left Écouen with fifteen hundred horse and a hundred gentlemen——"

"Have they any following?" said the Duke.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Simeuse. "There are two thousand six hundred of them in all. Some say that Thoré is behind with a troop of infantry. If Montmorency amuses himself with waiting for his son, you have time before you to undo him."

"And that is all you know? Are his motives for this rush to arms commonly reported?"

"Anne speaks as little as he writes; do you go and meet him, brother, while I will greet him here with his nephew's head," said the cardinal, ordering an attendant to fetch Robertet.

"Vieilleville," cried the Duke to the marshal, who came in, "the Connétable de Montmorency has dared to take up arms. If I go out to meet him, will you be responsible for keeping order in the town?"

"The instant you are out of it, the townsfolk will rise; and who can foresee the issue of a fray between horsemen and citizens in such narrow streets?" replied the marshal.

"My lord!" said Robertet, flying up the stairs, "the chancellor is at the gates and insists on coming in; are we to admit him?"

"Yes, admit him," said the Cardinal de Lorraine. "The constable and the chancellor together would be too dangerous; we must keep them apart. We were finely tricked by the Queen-mother when we elected l'Hôpital to that office."

Robertet nodded to a captain who awaited the reply at the foot of the stairs, and returned quickly to take the cardinal's orders.

"My lord," said he, making a last effort, "I take the liberty of representing to you that the sentence requires the approval of the King in Council. If you violate the law for a Prince of the Blood, it will not be respected in favor of a cardinal or of a Duc de Guise."

"Pinard has disturbed your mind, Robertet," said the

cardinal sternly. "Do you not know that the King signed the warrant on the day when he went out, leaving it to us to carry it out?"

"Though you are almost requiring my head of me when you give me this duty—which, however, will be that of the town-provost—I obey, my lord."

The Grand Master heard the debate without wincing; but he took his brother by the arm and led him to a corner of the hall.

"Of course," said he, "the direct heirs of Charlemagne have the right to take back the crown which was snatched from their family by Hugues Capet; but—can they? The pear is not ripe. Our nephew is dying, and all the Court is gone over to the King of Navarre."

"The King's heart failed him; but for that, the Béarnais would have been stabbed," replied the cardinal, "and we could easily have disposed of the children."

"We are in a bad position here," said the Duke. "The revolt in the town will be supported by the States-General. L'Hôpital, whom we have befriended so well and whose elevation Queen Catherine opposed, is now our foe, and we need the law on our side. The Queen-mother has too many adherents now to allow of our sending her away. And, beside, there are three more boys!"

"She is no longer a mother; she is nothing but a queen," said the cardinal. "In my opinion, this is the very moment to be rid of her. Energy, and again energy! that is what I prescribe."

Having said this, the cardinal went back into the King's room, and the Duke followed him. The prelate then went straight up to Catherine.

"The papers found on La Sagne, the Prince de Condé's secretary, have been communicated to you," said he. "You know that the Bourbons mean to dethrone your children?"

"I know it all," said the Queen.

"Well, then, will you not have the King of Navarre arrested?"

"There is a lieutenant-general of the kingdom," replied she.

At this moment Francis complained of the most violent pain in his ear, and began to moan lamentably. The physician left the fireplace, where he was warming himself, and came to examine the patient's head.

"Well, monsieur?" said the Grand Master, addressing him.

"I dare not apply a compress to draw the evil humors. Master Ambroise has undertaken to save his majesty by an operation, and I should annoy him by doing so."

"Put it off till to-morrow," said Catherine calmly, "and be present, all of you medical men; for you know what calumnies the death of a prince gives ground for."

She kissed her son's hands and withdrew.

"How coolly that audacious trader's daughter can speak of the Dauphin's death, poisoned as he was by Montecuculi, a Florentine of her suite!" cried Mary Stewart.

"Marie," said the little King, "my grandfather never cast a suspicion on her innocence."

"Can we not hinder that woman from coming here to-morrow?" said the Queen in an undertone to her two uncles.

"What would become of us if the King should die?" replied the cardinal. "Catherine would hurl us all into his grave."

And so that night the question stood plainly stated between Catherine de' Medici and the House of Lorraine. The arrival of the chancellor and the Connétable de Montmorency pointed to rebellion, and the dawn of the morrow would prove decisive.

On the following day the Queen-mother was the first to appear. She found no one in her son's room but Mary Stewart, pale and fatigued from having passed the night in prayer by the bedside. The Duchesse de Guise had kept the Queen

company, and the maids of honor had relieved each other. The young King was asleep.

Neither the Duke nor the cardinal had yet appeared. The prelate, more daring than the soldier, had spent this last night, it is said, in vehement argument, without being able to induce the Duke to proclaim himself King. With the States-General sitting in the town, and the prospect of a battle to be fought with the constable, the Balafré did not think the opportunity favorable; he refused to arrest the Queen-mother, the chancellor, Cardinal de Tournon, the Gondis, Ruggieri, and Birague, in face of the revolt that would inevitably result from such violent measures. He made his brother's schemes dependent on the life of Francis II.

Perfect silence reigned in the King's bedchamber. Catherine, attended by Madame de Fieschi, came to the bedside and gazed at her son with an admirable assumption of grief. She held her handkerchief to her eyes and retreated to the window, where Madame de Fieschi brought her a chair. From thence she could look down into the courtyard.

It had been agreed between Catherine and the Cardinal de Tournon that if Montmorency got safely into the town, he, the cardinal, would come to her, accompanied by the two Gondis; in case of disaster, he was to come alone. At nine in the morning the two Princes of Lorraine, accompanied by their suite, who remained in the hall, came to the King's room. The captain on duty had informed them that Ambroise Paré had but just arrived with Chapelain and three other physicians, prompted by Catherine de' Medici, and all hating Ambroise Paré.

In a few minutes the great hall of the bailliage presented precisely the same appearance as the guardroom at Blois on the day when the Duc de Guise was appointed lieutenant-general of the kingdom, and when Christophe was tortured; with only this difference, that then love and glee reigned in the royal rooms, and that the Guises were triumphant;

whereas now death and grief prevailed, and the Princes of Lorraine felt the power slipping from their grasp.

The maids of honor of the two Queens were grouped on opposite sides of the great fireplace, where an immense fire was blazing. The room was full of courtiers.

The news, repeated no one knows by whom, of a bold plan of Ambroise Paré's for saving the King's life, brought in every gentleman who had any right to appear at Court. The outer steps of the house and the courtyard were thronged with anxious groups. The scaffold erected for the Prince, opposite the convent of the Récollets, astonished all the nobles. People spoke in whispers, and here, as at Blois, the conversation was a medley of serious and frivolous subjects, of grave and trivial talk. They were beginning to feel used to turmoils, to sudden rebellion, to a rush to arms, to revolts, to the great and sudden events which marked the long period during which the House of Valois was dying out, in spite of Queen Catherine's efforts. Deep silence was kept for some distance outside the bedroom door, where two men-at-arms were on guard, with two pages, and the captain of the Scotch company.

Antoine de Bourbon,* a prisoner in his lodgings, finding himself neglected, understood the hopes of the courtiers; he was overwhelmed at hearing of the preparations made during the night for his brother's execution.

In front of the hall fireplace stood one of the finest and grandest figures of his time, the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, in his crimson robes bordered with ermine, and wearing his square cap, in right of his office. This brave man, regarding his benefactors as the leaders of a rebellion, had espoused the cause of his king, as represented by the Queen-mother; and, at the risk of his head, he had gone to Écouen to consult the Connétable de Montmorency. No one dared to disturb the meditations in which he was plunged. Robertet, the secretary of state, two marshals of France, Vieilleville and Saint-

* Antony, King of Navarre, husband of Jeanne d'Albret.

André, and the keeper of the seals, formed a group in front of the chancellor.

The men of the Court were not actually laughing, but their tone was sprightly, especially among those who were disaffected to the Guises.

The cardinal had at last secured Stewart, the Scotchman who had murdered President Minard, and was arranging for his trial at Tours. He had also confined in the Castles of Blois and of Tours a considerable number of gentlemen who had seemed compromised, to inspire a certain degree of terror in the nobles; they, however, were not terrified, but saw in the Reformation a fulcrum for the love of resistance they derived from a feeling of their inborn equality with the King. Now, the prisoners at Blois had contrived to escape, and, by a singular fatality, those who had been shut up at Tours had just followed their example.

"Madame," said the Cardinal de Châtillon to Madame de Fieschi, "if any one takes an interest in the prisoners from Tours, they are in the greatest danger."

On hearing this speech, the chancellor looked round at the group of the elder Queen's maids of honor.

"Yes, for young Desvaux, the Prince de Condé's equerry, who was imprisoned at Tours, added a bitter jest to his escape. He is said to have written a note to Messieurs de Guise to this effect:

"'We have heard of the escape of your prisoners at Blois; it has grieved us so much that we are about to run after them; we will bring them back to you as soon as we have arrested them.'"

Though he relished this pleasantry, the chancellor looked sternly at Monsieur de Châtillon.

At this instant louder voices were heard in the King's bedchamber. The two marshals, with Robertet and the chancellor,

went forward, for it was not merely a question of life and death to the King; everybody was in the secret of the danger to the chancellor, to Catherine, and to her adherents. The silence that ensued was absolute.

Ambroise had examined the King; the moment seemed favorable for the operation; if it were not performed he might die at any moment. As soon as the brothers de Guise came in, he explained to them the causes of the King's sufferings, and demonstrated that in such extremities trepanning was absolutely necessary. He only awaited the decision of the physicians.

"Pierce my son's skull as if it were a board, and with that horrible instrument!" cried Catherine de' Medici. "Master Ambroise, I will not permit it."

The doctors were consulting, but Catherine spoke so loud that, as she intended, her words were heard in the outer room.

"But, madame, if that is the only hope of saving him?" said Mary Stewart, weeping.

"Ambroise," said Catherine, "remember that you answer for the King with your head."

"We are opposed to the means proposed by Master Ambroise," said the three physicians. "The King may be saved by injecting a remedy into the ear which will release the humors through that passage."

The Duc de Guise, who was studying Catherine's face, suddenly went up to her and led her into the window-bay, apart from the throng.

"You, madame," said he, "wish your son to die; you are in collusion with your enemies, and that since we came from Blois. This morning Councilor Viole told your furrier's son that the Prince de Condé was to be beheaded. That young man, who, under torture, had denied all knowledge of the Prince de Condé, gave him a farewell greeting as he passed the window of the lad's prison. You looked on at

your hapless accomplice's sufferings with royal indifference. Now, you are opposed to your eldest son's life being saved. You will force us to believe that the death of the Dauphin, which placed the crown on the head of the late King, was not natural, but that Montecuculi was your——"

"Monsieur le Chancelier!" Catherine called out, and at this signal Madame de Fieschi threw open the double doors of the bedchamber.

The persons assembled in the hall could thus see the whole scene in the King's room: the little King, deadly pale, his features sunk, his eyes dim, but repeating the word "Marie," while he held the hand of the young Queen, who was weeping; the Duchesse de Guise standing, terrified by Catherine's audacity; the two Princes of Lorraine, not less anxious, but keeping close to the Queen-mother, and resolved to have her arrested by Maillé-Brézé; and, finally, the great surgeon Ambroise Paré, with the King's physician. He stood holding his instruments, but not daring to perform the operation, for which perfect quiet was as necessary as the approbation of the medical authorities.

"Monsieur le Chancelier," said Catherine, "Messieurs de Guise wish to authorize a strange operation on the King's person. Ambroise proposes to perforate his head. I, as his mother, and one of the commission of Regency, protest against what seems to me to be high treason. The three physicians are in favor of an injection which, to me, seems quite as efficacious and less dangerous than the cruel process recommended by Ambroise."

At these words there was a dull murmur in reply. The cardinal admitted the chancellor, and then shut the bedroom doors.

"But I am lieutenant-general of the realm," said the Duc de Guise, "and you must understand, Monsieur de Chancelier, that Ambroise, surgeon to his majesty, answers for the King's life."

"Well, since this is the state of affairs," said the great Ambroise Paré, "I know what to be doing."

He put out his arm over the bed.

"This bed and the King are mine," said he. "I constitute myself the sole master, and singly responsible; I know the duties of my office, and I will operate on the King without the physicians' sanction."

"Save him!" cried the cardinal, "and you shall be the richest man in France."

"Only go on," said Mary Stewart, pressing Paré's hand.

"I cannot interfere," said the chancellor, "but I shall record the Queen-mother's protest."

"Robertet," the Duc de Guise called out.

Robertet came in, and the Duke pointed to the chancellor.

"You are Chancellor of France," he said, "in the place of this felon. Monsieur de Maillé, take Monsieur de l'Hôpital to prison with the Prince de Condé. As to you, madame," and he turned to Catherine, "your protest will not be recognized, and you would do well to remember that such actions need the support of adequate force. I am acting as a faithful and loyal subject of King Francis II., my sovereign. Proceed, Ambroise," he said to the surgeon.

"Monsieur de Guise," said l'Hôpital, "if you use any violence, either on the person of the King or on that of his chancellor, remember that in the hall without there is enough French nobility to arrest all traitors."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said the surgeon, "if you prolong this debate, you may as well shout 'Vive Charles IX.,' for King Francis is dying."

Catherine stood unmoved, looking out of the window.

"Well, then, we will use force to remain masters in the King's bedroom," said the cardinal, trying to keep the door; but he was startled and horrified, for the great hall was quite

deserted. The Court, sure that the King was dying, had gone back to Antoine of Navarre.

"Come; do it, do it!" cried Mary Stewart to Ambroise. "I and you, Duchess," she said to Madame de Guise, "will protect you."

"Nay, madame," said Paré, "my zeal carried me too far; the doctors, with the exception of my friend Chapelain, are in favor of the injection; I must yield to them. If I were physician and surgeon-in-chief, he could be saved! Give it to me," he said, taking a small syringe from the hand of the chief physician and filling it.

"Good God!" cried Mary Stewart; "I command you to——"

"Alas! madame," replied Paré, "I am subordinate to these gentlemen."

The young Queen and the Duchesse de Guise stood between the surgeon and the doctors and the other persons present. The chief physician held the King's head, and Ambroise made the injection into the ear. The two Princes of Lorraine were watchful; Robertet and Monsieur de Maillé stood motionless. At a sign from Catherine, Madame de Fieschi left the room unnoticed. At the same instant l'Hôpital boldly threw open the door of the King's bedroom.

"I have arrived in the nick of time," exclaimed a man, whose hasty steps rang through the hall, and who, in another minute, was at the door of the King's room. "What, gentlemen! You thought to cut off my fine nephew, the Prince de Condé's head? You have roused the lion from his lair, and here he is!" added the Connétable de Montmorency. "Ambroise, you are not to stir up my King's brains with your instruments! The Kings of France do not allow themselves to be knocked about in that way unless by their enemies' sword in fair fight! The first Prince of the Blood, Antoine de Bourbon, the Prince de Condé, the Queen-mother, and the chancellor are all opposed to the operation."

"YOU, MADAME, HAVE KILLED YOUR SON!"
SAID MARY STEWART.

To Catherine's great satisfaction, the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé both made their appearance.

"What is the meaning of this?" said the Duc de Guise, laying his hand on his poniard.

"As lord high constable, I have dismissed all the sentinels from their posts. Blood and thunder! we are not in an enemy's country, I suppose. The King our master is surrounded by his subjects, and the States-General of the realm may deliberate in perfect liberty. I have just come from the Assembly, gentlemen; I laid before it the protest of my nephew de Condé, who has been rescued by three hundred gentlemen. You meant to let the royal blood and to decimate the nobility of France. Henceforth I shall not trust anything you propose, Messieurs de Lorraine. And if you give the order for the King's head to be opened, by this sword, which saved France from Charles V., I say it shall not be done——!"

"All the more so," said Ambroise Paré, "because it is too late, suffusion has begun."

"Your reign is over, gentlemen," said Catherine to the two Guises, seeing from Paré's manner that there was now no hope.

"You, madame, have killed your son!" said Mary Stewart, springing like a lioness from the bed to the window, and seizing the Italian Queen by the arm with a vehement clutch.

"My dear," replied Catherine de' Medici, with a keen, cold look that expressed the hatred she had suppressed for six months past, "you, to whose violent passion this death is due, will now go to reign over your own Scotland—and you will go to-morrow. I am now Regent in fact as well as in name."

The three physicians had made a sign to the Queen-mother.

"Gentlemen," she went on, addressing the Guises, "it is an understood thing between Monsieur de Bourbon—whom I hereby appoint lieutenant-general of the kingdom—and myself that the conduct of affairs is our business. Come, Monsieur le Chancellor."

"The King is dead!" said the Grand Master, obliged to carry out the functions of his office.

"God save King Charles IX.!" cried the gentlemen who had come with the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and the constable.

The ceremonies performed when a King of France dies were carried out in solitude. When the king-at-arms called out three times in the great hall, "The King is dead!" after the official announcement by the Duc de Guise, there were but a few persons present to answer—"God save the King!"

The Queen-mother, to whom the Countess Fieschi brought the Duc d'Orleans, now Charles IX., left the room leading the boy by the hand, and followed by the whole Court. Only the two Guises, the Duchesse de Guise, Mary Stewart, and Dayelle remained in the room where Francis II. had breathed his last, with two guards at the door, the Grand Master's pages and the cardinal's, and their two private secretaries.

"Vive la France!" shouted some of the Reformers, a first cry of opposition.

Robertet, who owed everything to the Duke and the cardinal, terrified by their schemes and their abortive attempts, secretly attached himself to the Queen-mother, whom the ambassadors of Spain, England, the German Empire, and Poland met on the stairs, at their head Cardinal Tournon, who had gone to call them after looking up from the courtyard to Catherine de' Medici just as she was protesting against Ambroise Paré's operation.

"Well, the sons of Louis d'Outre-Mer,* the descendants of Charles de Lorraine, have proved cravens," said the cardinal to the Duke.

"They would have been packed off to Lorraine," replied his brother. "I declare to you, Charles," he went on, "if the crown were there for the taking, I would not put out my hand for it. That will be my son's task."

* From over the sea.

"Will he ever have the army and the church on his side as you have?"

"He will have something better."

"What?"

"The people."

"And there is no one to mourn for him but me—the poor boy who loved me so well!" said Mary Stewart, holding the cold hand of her first husband.

"How can we be reconciled to the Queen?" said the cardinal.

"Wait till she quarrels with the Huguenots," said the Duchess.

The clashing interests of the House of Bourbon, of Catherine, of the Guises, and of the Reformers produced such confusion in Orleans that it was not till three days after that the King's body, quite forgotten where it lay, was placed in a coffin by obscure serving men, and carried to Saint-Denis in a covered vehicle, followed only by the Bishop of Senlis and two gentlemen. When this dismal little procession arrived at the town of Etampes, a follower of the Chancellor de l'Hôpital attached to the hearse this bitter inscription, which history has recorded: "Tanneguy du Chastel, where are you? Yet you, too, were French!" A stinging innuendo, striking at Catherine, Mary Stewart, and the Guises. For what Frenchman does not know that Tanneguy du Chastel spent thirty thousand crowns (a million of francs in these days) on the obsequies of Charles VII., the founder and benefactor of his family?

As soon as the tolling bells announced the death of Francis II., and the Connétable de Montmorency had thrown open the gates of the town, Tourillon went up to his hayloft and made his way to a hiding-place.

"What, can he be dead?" exclaimed the glover.

On hearing the voice, a man rose and replied, "*Prêt à*

servir" ("Ready to serve," or "Ready, aye ready"), the watchword of the Reformers of Calvin's sect.

This man was Chaudieu, to whom Tourillon related the events of the past week, during which he had left the preacher alone in his hiding-place with a twelve-ounce loaf for his sole sustenance.

"Be off to the Prince de Condé, brother, ask him for a safe-conduct for me, and find me a horse," cried the preacher. "I must set out this moment."

"Write him a line, then, that I may be admitted."

"Here," said Chaudieu, after writing a few lines, "ask for a pass from the King of Navarre, for under existing circumstances I must hasten to Geneva."

Within two hours all was ready, and the zealous minister was on his way to Geneva, escorted by one of the King of Navarre's gentlemen, whose secretary Chaudieu was supposed to be, and who was the bearer of instructions to the Reformed party in Dauphiné.

Chaudieu's sudden departure was at once permitted, to further the interests of Queen Catherine, who, to gain time, made a bold suggestion which was kept a profound secret. This startling scheme accounts for the agreement so unexpectedly arrived at between the Queen and the leaders of the Protestant party. The crafty woman had, as a guarantee of her good faith, expressed a desire to heal the breach between the two churches in an assembly which could be neither a Synod, nor a Council, nor a Convocation, for which indeed a new name was needed, and, above all else, Calvin's consent. It may be said in passing that, when this mystery came out, it led to the alliance of the Guises with the Connétable de Montmorency against Catherine and the King of Navarre—a strange coalition, known to history as the Triumvirate, because the Maréchal de Saint-André was the third person in this purely Catholic combination, to which Catherine's strange proposal for a meeting gave rise. The Guises were then en-

abled to judge very shrewdly of Catherine's policy; they saw that the Queen cared little enough for this assembly, and only wanted to temporize with her allies till Charles IX. should be of age; indeed, they deceived Montmorency by making him believe in a collusion between Catherine and the Bourbons, while Catherine was taking them all in. The Queen, it will be seen, had in a short time made great strides.

The spirit of argument and discussion which was then in the air was particularly favorable to this scheme. The Catholics and the Huguenots were all to shine in turn in this tournament of words. Indeed, that is exactly what happened. Is it not extraordinary that historians should have mistaken the Queen's shrewdest craft for hesitancy? Catherine never went more directly to the end she had in view than when she seemed to have turned her back on it. So the King of Navarre, incapable of fathoming Catherine's motives, dispatched Chaudieu to Calvin; Chaudieu having secretly intended to watch the course of events at Orleans, where he ran, every hour, the risk of being seized and hanged without trial, like any man who had been condemned to banishment.

At the rate of traveling then possible Chaudieu could not reach Geneva before the month of February, the negotiations could not be completed until March, and the meeting could not be called until the beginning of May, 1561. Catherine intended to amuse the Court meanwhile, and lull party-feeling by the King's coronation, and by his first bed of justice in the Parlement when L'Hôpital and de Thou passed the royal letter, by which Charles IX. intrusted the government of the kingdom to his mother, seconded by Antoine de Navarre as lieutenant-general of the realm—the weakest prince of his time.

Was it not one of the strangest things of that day to see a whole kingdom in suspense for the Yea or Nay of a French citizen, risen from obscurity, and living at Geneva? The Pope of Rome held in check by the new Pope of Geneva?

The two Princes of Lorraine, once so powerful, paralyzed by a brief concord between the first Prince of the Blood, the Queen-mother, and Calvin? Is it not one of the most pregnant lessons that history has preserved to kings, a lesson that should teach them to judge of men, to give genius its due without any hesitation, and to seek it out, as Louis XIV. did, wherever God has hidden it?

Calvin, whose real name was not Calvin, but Cauvin, was the son of a cooper at Noyon, in Picardy. Calvin's birthplace accounts to a certain degree for the obstinacy mingled with eccentric irritability which characterized the arbiter of the destinies of France in the sixteenth century. No one is less known than this man, who was the maker of Geneva and of the spirit of its people. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who knew little of history, was utterly ignorant of this man's influence on his Republic.

At first, indeed, Calvin, dwelling in one of the humblest houses in the upper town, near the Protestant church of Saint-Pierre, over a carpenter's shop—one point of resemblance between him and Robespierre—had no great authority in Geneva. His influence was for a long time checked by the hatred of the Genevese.

In the sixteenth century Geneva could boast of Farel, one of those famous citizens who have remained unknown to the world, some of them even to Geneva itself. In the year 1537, or thereabouts, this Farel attached Calvin to Geneva by pointing out to him that it might become the stronghold of a reformation more thorough than that of Luther. Farel and Cauvin looked on Lutheranism as an incomplete achievement, ineffectual, and with no hold on France. Geneva, lying between France and Italy, speaking the French tongue, was admirably placed for communicating with Germany, Italy, and France. Calvin adopted Geneva as the seat of his spiritual fortunes, and made it the citadel of his dogmas. At Farel's request, the town council of Geneva authorized Calvin to lecture on

theology in the month of September, 1538. Calvin left preaching to Farel, his first disciple, and patiently devoted himself to teaching his doctrine. His authority, which in the later years of his life was paramount, took long to establish. The great leader met with serious difficulties; he was even banished from Geneva for some time in consequence of the austerity of his doctrines. There was a party of very good folk who clung to their old luxury and the customs of their fathers. But, as is always the case, these worthy people dreaded ridicule; they would not admit what was the real object of their struggles, and the battle was fought over details apart from the real question.

Calvin insisted on leavened bread being used for the sacrament, and on there being no holy days but Sunday. These innovations were disapproved of at Berne and at Lausanne. The Genevese were required to conform to the ritual of Switzerland. Calvin and Farel resisted; their political enemies made a pretext of this refractoriness to exile them from Geneva, whence they were banished for some years. At a later period Calvin came back in triumph, invited by his flock.

Such persecution is always a consecration of moral power when the prophet can wait. And this return was the era of this Mahomet. Executions began, and Calvin organized his religious terror. As soon as this commanding spirit reappeared, he was admitted to the citizenship of Geneva; but, after fourteen years' residence there, he was not yet on the Council. At the time when Catherine was dispatching a minister to treat with him, this king in the realm of thought had no title but that of pastor of the church of Geneva. Indeed, Calvin never had more than a hundred and fifty francs a year in money, fifteen hundredweight of grain, and two casks of wine for his whole remuneration. His brother, a tailor, kept a shop a few paces away from the Place Saint-Pierre, in a street where one of Calvin's printing-places may still be seen.

Such disinterestedness, which in Voltaire and Bacon was lacking, but which is conspicuous in the life of Rabelais, of Campanella, of Luther, of Vico, of Descartes, of Malebranche, of Spinoza, of Loyola, of Kant, and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, surely forms a noble setting for these sublime and ardent souls.

Robespierre's life, so like that of Calvin, can alone, perhaps, enable our contemporaries to understand Calvin's. He, founding his power on a similar basis, was as cruel and as tyrannical as the Arras lawyer. It is strange, too, that Picardy —Arras and Noyon—should have given to the world these two great instruments of reform. Those who examine into the motives of the executions ordered by Calvin will find, on a different scale, no doubt, all of 1793 at Geneva. Calvin had Jacques Gruet beheaded "for having written impious letters and worldly verse, and labored to overthrow church ordinances." Just consider this sentence, and ask yourself if the worst despotism can show in its annals a more absurdly preposterous indictment.

Valentin Gentilis, condemned to death for involuntary heresy, escaped the scaffold only by making more humiliating amends than ever were inflicted by the Catholic church. Seven years before the conference presently to be held in Calvin's house, on the Queen-mother's proposals, Michel Servet (or Servetus), a Frenchman, passing through Geneva, was put in prison, tried, condemned on Calvin's testimony, and burnt alive for having attacked the mystery of the trinity in a work which had not been either composed or printed at Geneva. Compare with this the eloquent defense of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose book, attacking the Catholic religion, written in France and published in Holland, was indeed burnt by the hand of the executioner; but the writer, a foreigner, was only banished from the kingdom, where he had been trying to strike at the fundamental truths of religion

NOTE.—Up to 1561 the Lutherans and Calvinists were one.

and government; and compare the conduct of the Parlement with that of the Genevese tyrant.

Bolsée, again, was brought to judgment for having other ideas than Calvin on the subject of predestination. Weigh all this, and say whether Fouquier-Tinville did anything worse. Calvin's fierce religious intolerance was, morally speaking, more intense, more implacable, than the fierce political intolerance of Robespierre. On a wider stage than was offered by Geneva, Calvin would have shed more blood than the terrible apostle of political equality, as compared with Catholic equality.

Three centuries earlier a monk, also a son of Picardy, had led the whole of Western Europe to invade the East. Peter the Hermit, Calvin, and Robespierre, sons of the same soil, at intervals of three centuries, were, in a political sense, the levers of Archimedes. Each in turn was an embodied idea finding its fulcrum in the interests of man.

Calvin is, beyond doubt, the—almost unrecognized—maker of that dismal town of Geneva, where, only ten years since, a man, pointing out a carriage gate—the first in the town, for till then there had only been house-doors in Geneva—said, "Through that gate luxury drove into Geneva." Calvin, by the severity of his sentences and the austerity of his doctrine, introduced the hypocritical feeling that has been well called Puritanism [the nearest English equivalent perhaps to the French word *môмerie*]. Good conduct, according to the *môмiers* or puritans, lay in renouncing the arts and the graces of life, in eating well but without luxury, and in silently amassing money without enjoying it otherwise than as Calvin enjoyed his power—in fancy.

Calvin clothed the citizens in the same gloomy livery as he threw over life in general. He formed in the Consistory a perfect Calvinist inquisition, exactly like the revolutionary tribunal instituted by Robespierre. The Consistory handed over the victims to be condemned by the Council, which

Calvin ruled through the Consistory just as Robespierre ruled the Convention through the Jacobin Club. Thus an eminent magistrate of Geneva was sentenced to two months' imprisonment, to lose his office, and to be prohibited from ever filling any other, because he led a dissolute life and had made friends among Calvin's foes. In this way Calvin was actually a legislator; it was he who created the austere manners, sober, respectable, hideously dull, but quite irreproachable, which have remained unchanged in Geneva to this day; they prevailed there indeed before the English habits were formed that are universally known as Puritanism, under the influence of the Cameronians, the followers of Caméron, a Frenchman who trod in Calvin's steps. These manners have been admirably described by Walter Scott.

The poverty of this man, an absolute sovereign, who treated as a power with other powers, asking for their treasure, demanding armies, and filling his hands with their money for the poor, proves that the Idea, regarded as the sole means of dominion, begets political misers, men whose only enjoyment is intellectual, and who, like the jesuits, love power for its own sake. Pitt, Luther, Calvin, and Robespierre, all these *Harpagons* in greed of dominion, died penniless. History has preserved the inventory made in Calvin's room after his death, and everything, including his books, was valued at fifty crowns. Luther's possessions amounted to as much; indeed, his widow, the famons Catherine de Bora, was obliged to petition for a pension of fifty crowns bestowed on her by a German Elector.

Potemkim, Mazarin, and Richelieu, men of thought and action, who all three founded or prepared the foundations of empires, each left three hundred millions of francs; but these men had a heart, they loved women and the arts, they built and conquered; while, with the exception of Luther, whose wife was the Helen of this Iliad, none of the others could accuse himself of ever having felt his heart throb for a woman.

This brief history was needed to explain Calvin's position at Geneva.

One day early in February, 1561, on one of the mild evenings which occur at that time of year on the shores of Lake Leman, two men on horseback arrived at Pré-l'Evêque, so-called from the ancient residence of the Bishop of Geneva, driven out thirty years before. These two men, acquainted, no doubt, with the laws of Geneva as to the closing of the gates, very necessary then, and absurd enough in these days, rode toward the Porte de Rives; but they suddenly drew rein at the sight of a man of fifty, walking with the help of a woman-servant's arm, and evidently returning to the town. This personage, rather stout in figure, walked slowly and with difficulty, dragging one foot before the other with evident pain, and wearing broad, laced shoes of black velvet.

"It is he," said Chaudieu's companion, who dismounted, gave his bridle to the preacher, and went forward open-armed to meet the master.

The man on foot, who was in fact Jean Calvin, drew back to avoid the embrace, and cast the severest glance at his disciple. At the age of fifty Calvin looked like a man of seventy. Thick-set and fat, he seemed all the shorter because frightful pain from the stone obliged him to walk much bent. These sufferings were complicated with attacks of the worst form of gout. Anybody might have quaked at the aspect of that face, almost as broad as it was long, and bearing no more signs of good-nature, in spite of its roundness, than that of the dreadful King Henry VIII., whom Calvin, in fact, resembled. His sufferings, which never gave him a reprieve, were visible in two deep furrows on each side of his nose, following the line of his mustache, and ending, like it, in a full gray beard.

This face, though red and inflamed like a drunkard's, showed patches where his complexion was yellow; still, and in spite of the velvet cap that covered his massive, broad

head, it was possible to admire a large and nobly formed forehead, and beneath it two sparkling brown eyes, which in moments of wrath could flash fire. Whether by reason of his bulk, or because his neck was too thick and short, or, as a consequence of late hours and incessant work, Calvin's head seemed sunk between his broad shoulders, which compelled him to wear a quite shallow, pleated ruff, on which his face rested like John the Baptist's in the charger. Between his mustache and his beard there peeped, like a rose, a sweet and eloquent mouth, small, and fresh, and perfectly formed. This face was divided by a square nose remarkable for its long aquiline outline, resulting in high-lights at the tip, significantly in harmony with the prodigious power expressed in this magnificent head.

Though it was difficult to detect in these features any trace of the constant headaches which tormented Calvin in the intervals of a slow fever that was consuming him, pain, constantly defied by study and a strong will, gave this apparently florid face a terrible tinge, attributable, no doubt, to the hue of the layer of fat due to the sedentary habits of a hard worker. It bore the marks of the perpetual struggle of a sickly temperament against one of the strongest wills known in the history of mankind. Even the lips, though beautiful, expressed cruelty. A chaste life, indispensable to vast projects, and compulsory in such conditions of sickly health, had set its stamp on the face. There was regret in the serenity of that mighty brow, and suffering in the gaze of the eyes, whose calmness was a terror.

Calvin's dress gave effect to his head, for he wore the famous black cloth gown, belted with a cloth band and brass buckle, which was adopted as the costume of Calvinist preachers, and which, having nothing to attract the eye, directed all the spectator's attention to the face.

"I am in too great pain to embrace you, Théodore," said Calvin to the elegant horseman.

Théodore de Bèze, at that time two-and-forty, and, by Calvin's desire, a free citizen of Geneva for two years past, was the most striking contrast to the terrible minister to whom he had given his allegiance. Calvin, like all men of the middle-class who have risen to moral supremacy, like all inventors of a social system, was consumed with jealousy. He abhorred his disciples, would suffer no equal, and could not endure the slightest contradiction. However, between him and Théodore de Bèze the difference was so great; this elegant gentleman, gifted with a charming appearance, polished, courteous, and accustomed to Court life, was, in his eyes, so unlike all his fierce Janissaries, that for him he set aside his usual impulses. He never loved him, for this crabbed lawgiver knew absolutely nothing of friendship; but having no fear of finding his successor in him, he liked to play with Théodore, as Richelieu at a later time played with his cat. He found him pliant and amusing. When he saw that de Bèze succeeded to perfection in every mission, he took delight in the polished tool of which he believed himself to be the soul and guide; so true is it that even those men who seem most surly cannot live without some semblance of affection.

Théodore was Calvin's spoilt child. The great Reformer never scolded him, overlooked his irregularities, his love affairs, his handsome dress, and his choice language. Possibly Calvin was well content to show that the Reformation could hold its own even among Court circles. Théodore de Bèze wanted to introduce a taste for art, letters, and poetry into Geneva, and Calvin would listen to his schemes without knitting his grizzled brows. Thus the contrast of character and person was as complete as the contrast of mind in these two celebrated men.

Calvin accepted Chaudieu's very humble bow, and replied by slightly bending his head. Chaudieu slipped the bridles of both horses over his right arm and followed the two great Reformers, keeping to the right of Théodore de Bèze, who

was walking on Calvin's right. Calvin's housekeeper ran forward to prevent the gate being shut, by telling the captain of the Guard that the pastor had just had a severe attack of pain.

Théodore de Bèze was a native of the Commune of Vézelay, the first to demand for itself corporate government, of which the curious tale has been told by one of the Thierrys. Thus the spirit of citizenship and resistance which was endemic to Vézelay no doubt contributed an item to the great rising of the Reformers in the person of this man, who is certainly a most singular figure in the history of heresy.

"So you still suffer great pain?" said Théodore to Calvin.

"The sufferings of the damned, a Catholic would say," replied the Reformer, with the bitterness that colored his least remarks. "Ah! I am going fast, my son, and what will become of you when I am gone?"

"We will fight by the light of your writings," said Chaudieu.

Calvin smiled; his purple face assumed a more gracious expression, and he looked kindly on Chaudieu.

"Well, have you brought me any news!" he asked. "Have they killed a great many of us?" he added with a smile, and a sort of mocking glee sparkled in his brown eyes.

"No," said Chaudieu; "peace is the order of the day."

"So much the worse, so much the worse!" cried Calvin. "Every form of peace would be a misfortune if it were not always, in fact, a snare. Our strength lies in persecution. Where should we be if the church took up the Reformation?"

"Indeed," said Théodore, "that is what the Queen-mother seems inclined to do."

"She is quite capable of it," said Calvin. "I am studying that woman."

"From hence?" cried Chaudieu.

"Does distance exist for the spirit?" said Calvin severely, regarding the interruption as irreverent. "Catherine longs

for power, and women who aim at that lose all sense of honor and faith. What is in the wind?"

"Well, she suggests a sort of Council," said Théodore de Bèze.

"Near Paris?" asked Calvin roughly.

"Yes."

"Ah! that is well!" said Calvin.

"And we are to try to come to an understanding, and draw up a public act to consolidate the two churches."

"Ah! if only she had courage enough to separate the French Church from the Church of Rome, and to create a patriarch in France, as in the Greek Church!"* cried the Reformer, whose eyes glistened at this idea, which would place him on a throne. "But, my son, can a Pope's niece be truthful? She only wants to gain time."

"And do not we need time to recover from our check at Amboise, and to organize some formidable resistance in various parts of the kingdom?"

"She has sent away the Queen of Scotland," said Chaudieu.

"That is one less, then," said Calvin, as they passed through the Porte de Rives. "Elizabeth of England will keep her busy. Two neighboring queens will soon be fighting; one is handsome, and the other ugly enough—a first cause of irritation; and then there is the question of legitimacy——"

He rubbed his hands, and his glee had such a ferocious taint that de Bèze shuddered, for he too saw the pool of blood at which his master was gazing.

"The Guises have provoked the House of Bourbon," said de Bèze after a pause; "they broke the stick between them at Orleans."

"Ay," said Calvin, "and you, my son, did not believe me when, as you last started for Nérac, I told you that we

* He is an absolute ruler; his title, Ecumenical.

should end by stirring up war to the death between the two branches of the royal family of France.

"So at last I have a court, a king, a dynasty on my side. My doctrine has had its effect on the masses. The citizen class understand me; henceforth they will call those who go to mass idolaters, those who paint the walls of their place of worship, and put up pictures and statues there. Oh, the populace find it far easier to demolish cathedrals and palaces than to discuss justification by faith or the real presence! Luther was a wrangler, I am an army! He was a reasoner, I am a system! He, my child, was but a tormentor, I am a Tarquin!

"Yes, they of the truth will destroy churches, will tear down pictures, will make millstones of the statues to grind the bread of the people. There are bodies in great States, I will have only individuals; bodies are too resistant, and see clearly when individuals are blind.

"Now, we must combine this agitating doctrine with political interests, to consolidate it and to keep up the material of my armies. I have satisfied the logic of thrifty minds and thinking brains by this bare, undecorated worship which lifts religion into the sphere of the ideal. I have made the mob understand the advantages of the suppression of ceremonial.

"Now, it is your part, Théodore, to enlist people's interests. Do not overstep that line. In the way of doctrine everything has been done, everything has been said; add not one jot! Why does Caméron, that little pastor in Gascony, meddle with writing?"

Calvin, Théodore de Bèze, and Chaudieu went along the streets of the upper town and through the crowd, without any attention being paid to the men who were unchaining the mob in cities and ravaging France. After this terrifying harangue, they walked on in silence, till they reached the little square of Saint-Pierre, and made their way toward the minister's dwelling. Calvin's lodging consisted of three

rooms on the third floor of this house, which is hardly known, and of which no one ever tells you in Geneva—where, indeed, there is no statue to Calvin. The rooms were floored and wainscoted with pine, and on one side there were a kitchen and a servant's room. The entrance, as is commonly the case in Genevese houses, was through the kitchen, which opened into a small room with two windows, parlor, dining, and drawing-room in one. Next to this was the study where, for fourteen years, Calvin's mind had carried on the battle with pain, and beyond was his bedroom. Four oak chairs with tapestry seats, placed around a long table, formed all the furniture of the sitting-room. A white earthenware stove in one corner of the room gave out a pleasant warmth; paneling of unvarnished pine covered the walls, and there was no other decoration. The bareness of the place was quite in keeping with the frugal and simple life led by the Reformer.

"Well," said de Bèze, as he went in, taking advantage of a few minutes when Chaudieu had left them to put up the horses at a neighboring inn, "what am I to do? Will you agree to this meeting?"

"Certainly," said Calvin. "You, my son, will bear the brunt of the struggle. Be decisive, absolute. Nobody—neither the Queen, nor the Guises, nor I—wants pacification as a result; it would not suit our purpose. I have much confidence in Duplessis-Mornay. Give him the leading part. We are alone——" said he, with a suspicious glance into the kitchen, of which the door was open, showing two shirts and some collars hung to dry on a line. "Go and shut all the doors. Well," he went on, when Théodore had done his bidding, "we must compel the King of Navarre to join the Guises and the Connétable de Montmorency, by advising him to desert Queen Catherine de' Medici. Let us take full advantage of his weakness; he is but a poor creature. If he prove a turncoat to the Italian woman, she, finding herself bereft of his support, must inevitably join the Prince de Condé and

Coligny. Such a manœuvre may possibly compromise her so effectually that she must remain on our side——"

Théodore de Bèze raised the hem of Calvin's gown and kissed it.

"Oh, master," said he, "you are indeed great!"

"Unfortunately, I am dying, my dear Théodore. If I should die before seeing you again," he went on, whispering in the ear of his Minister for Foreign Affairs, "remember to strike a great blow by the hand of one of our martyrs."

"Another Minard to be killed?"

"Higher than a lawyer."

"A king?"

"Higher still. The man who wants to be king."

"The Duc de Guise!" cried Théodore, with a gesture of dismay.

"Well," cried Calvin, fancying that he discerned refusal, or at least an instinct of resistance, and failing to notice the entrance of Chaudieu, "have we not a right to strike as we are struck? Yes, and in darkness and silence! May we not return wound for wound, and death for death? Do the Catholics hesitate to lay snares for us and kill us? I trust to you! Burn their churches. Go on, my sons! If you have any devoted youths——"

"I have," Chaudieu put in.

"Use them as weapons of war. To triumph, we may use every means. The Balafré, that terrible man of war, is, like me, more than a man; he is a dynasty, as I am a system; he is capable of annihilating us! Death to the Duc de Guise!"

"I should prefer a peaceful victory, brought about by time and reason," said de Bèze.

"By time!" cried Calvin, flinging over his chair. "By reason? Are you mad? Conquer by reason? Do you know nothing of men, you who live among them—idiot? What is so fatal to my teaching, thrice-dyed simpleton, is that it is based on reason. By the thunders of Saint Paul, by the sword

of the mighty! Pumpkin as you are, Théodore, cannot you see the power that the catastrophe at Amboise has given to my reforms? Ideas can never grow till they are watered with blood. The murder of the Duc de Guise would give rise to a fearful persecution, and I hope for it with all my might! To us reverses are more favorable than success. The Reformation can be beaten and endure, do you hear, oaf? Whereas Catholicism is overthrown if we win a single battle.

"What are these lieutenants of mine? Wet rags and not men! Guts on two legs! Christened baboons! O God, wilt Thou not grant me another ten years to live? If I die too soon, the cause of religion is lost in the hands of such rascals!

"You are as helpless as Antoine de Navarre! Begone! leave me! I must have a better messenger! You are an ass, a popinjay, a poet! Go, write your Catullics, your Tibullics, your acrostics! Hoo!"

The pain he suffered was entirely swamped by the fires of his wrath. Gout vanished before this fearful excitement. Calvin's face was blotched with purple, like the sky before a storm. His broad forehead shone. His eyes flashed fire. He was not like the same man. He let himself give way to this sort of epileptic frenzy, almost madness, which was habitual with him; but, then, struck by the silence of his two listeners, and observing Chaudieu, who said to de Bèze, "The burning bush of Horeb!" the minister sat down, was dumb, and covered his face with his hands, with their thickened joints, and his fingers quivered in spite of their strength.

A few minutes later, while still trembling from the last shocks of this tempest—the result of his austere life—he said in a broken voice—

"My vices, which are many, are less hard to subdue than my impatience! Ah! wild beast, shall I never conquer you?" he exclaimed, striking his breast.

"My beloved master," said de Bèze in a caressing tone,

taking his hands and kissing them, "Jove thunders, but he can smile."

Calvin looked at his disciple with a softened expression.

"Do not misunderstand me, my friends," he said in a milder tone.

"I understand that the shepherds of nations have terrible burdens to bear," replied Théodore. "You have a world on your shoulders."

"I," said Chaudieu, who had become thoughtful under the master's abuse, "have three martyrs on whom we can depend. Stewart, who killed the president, is free——"

"That will not do," said Calvin mildly, and smiling, as a great man can smile when fair weather follows a storm on his face, as if he were ashamed of the tempest. "I know men. He who kills one president will not kill a second."

"Is it absolutely necessary?" said de Bèze.

"What, again?" cried Calvin, his nostrils expanding. "There, go; you will put me in a rage again. You have my decision. You, Chaudieu, walk in your own path, and keep the Paris flock together. God be with you. Dinah! Light my friends out."

"Will you not allow me to embrace you?" said de Bèze with emotion. "Who can tell what the morrow even will bring forth? We may be imprisoned in spite of safe-conducts——"

"And yet you want to spare them?" said Calvin, embracing de Bèze.

He took Chaudieu's hand, saying—

"Mind you, not Huguenots, not Reformers: be Calvinists. Speak only of Calvinism. Alas! this is not ambition, for I am a dying man! Only, everything of Luther's must be destroyed, to the very names of Lutheran and Lutheranism."

"Indeed, divine man, you deserve such honor!" cried Chaudieu.

"Uphold uniformity of creed. Do not allow any further

examination or reconstruction. If new sects arise from among us, we are lost."

To anticipate events and dismiss Théodore de Bèze, who returned to Paris with Chaudieu, it may be said that Poltrot, who, eighteen months later, fired a pistol at the Duc de Guise, confessed, under torture, that he had been urged to the crime by Théodore de Bèze; however, he retracted this statement at a later stage. Indeed, Bossuet, who weighed all the historical evidence, did not think that the idea of this attempt was due to Théodore de Bèze. Since Bossuet, however, a dissertation of an apparently trivial character, *à propos* to a famous ballad, enabled a compiler of the eighteenth century to prove that the song sung throughout France by the Huguenots on the death of the Duc de Guise was written by Théodore de Bèze; and, moreover, that the well-known ballad or lament on Malbrouck—the Duke of Marlborough—is plagiarized from Théodore de Bèze.*

On the day when Théodore de Bèze and Chaudieu reached Paris, the Court had returned thither from Reims, where Charles IX. had been crowned. This ceremony, to which Catherine gave unusual splendor, making it the occasion of great festivities, enabled her to gather round her the leaders of every faction.

After studying the various parties and interests, she saw a choice of two alternatives—either to enlist them on the side of the throne or to set them against each other. The Connétable de Montmorency, above all else a Catholic, whose nephew, the Prince de Condé, was the leader of the Reformation, and whose children also had a leaning to that creed, blamed the Queen-mother for allying herself with that party. The Guises, on their side, worked hard to gain over Antoine de Bourbon, a Prince of no strength of character, and attach him to their faction, and his wife, the Queen of Navarre, informed by de Bèze, allowed this to be done. These diffi-

* See note at the end of this volume.

culties checked Catherine, whose newly acquired authority needed a brief period of tranquillity; she impatiently awaited Calvin's reply by de Bèze and Chaudieu, sent to the great Reformer on behalf of the Prince de Condé, the King of Navarre, Coligny, d'Andelot, and Cardinal de Châtillon.

Meanwhile, the Queen-mother was true to her promises to the Prince de Condé. The chancellor quashed the trial, in which Christophe was involved, by referring the case to the Paris Parlement, and they annulled the sentence pronounced by the Commission, declaring it incompetent to try a Prince of the Blood. The Parlement reopened the trial by the desire of the Guises and the Queen-mother. La Sagne's papers had been placed in Catherine's hands, and she had burnt them. This sacrifice was the first pledge given, quite vainly, by the Guises to the Queen-mother. The Parlement, not having this decisive evidence, reinstated the Prince in all his rights, possessions, and honors.

Christophe, thus released when Orleans was in all its excitement over the King's accession, was excluded from the case, and, as a compensation for his sufferings, was passed as a pleader by Monsieur de Thou.

The Triumvirate—the coalition of interests which were imperiled by Catherine's first steps in authority—was hatching under her very eyes. Just as in chemistry hostile elements fly asunder at the shock that disturbs their compulsory union, so in politics the alliance of antagonistic interests can never last long. Catherine fully understood that, sooner or later, she must fall back on the connétable and the Guises to fight the Huguenots. The convocation, which served to flatter the vanity of the orators on each side, and, as an excuse for another imposing ceremony after that of the coronation, to clear the blood-stained field for the religious war that had, indeed, already begun, was as futile in the eyes of the Guises as it was in Catherine's. The Catholics could not fail to be the losers; for the Huguenots, under the pretense of discus-

sion, would be able to proclaim their doctrine in the face of all France, under the protection of the King and his mother. The Cardinal de Lorraine, flattered by Catherine into the hope of conquering the heretics by the eloquence of the princes of the church, induced his brother to consent. To the Queen-mother six months of peace meant much.

A trivial incident was near wrecking the power which Catherine was so laboriously building up. This is the scene as recorded by history; it occurred on the very day when the envoys from Geneva arrived at the Hôtel de Coligny in the Rue Béthisy, not far from the Louvre. At the coronation, Charles IX., who was much attached to his instructor, Amyot, made him high almoner of France. This affection was fully shared by the Duc d'Anjou (Henry III.), who also was Amyot's pupil.

Catherine heard this from the two Gondis on the way home from Reims to Paris. She had relied on this Crown appointment to gain her a supporter in the church, and a person of importance to set against the Cardinal de Lorraine; she had intended to bestow it on Cardinal de Tournon, so as to find in him, as in l'Hôpital, a second crutch—to use her own words. On arriving at the Louvre, she sent for the preceptor. Her rage at seeing the catastrophe that threatened her policy from the ambition of this self-made man—the son of a shoemaker—was such that she addressed him in this strange speech recorded by certain chroniclers—

"What! I can make the Guises cringe, the Colignys, the Montmorencys, the House of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and I am to be balked by a priestling like you, who was not content to be Bishop of Auxerre!"

Amyot excused himself. He had, in fact, asked for nothing; the King had appointed him of his own free will to this office, of which he, a humble teacher, regarded himself as unworthy.

"Rest assured, master," for it was by this name that the

Kings Charles IX. and Henri III. addressed this great writer, "that you will not be left standing for twenty-four hours unless you induce your pupil to change his mind."

Between death promised him in such an uncompromising way, and the abdication of the highest ecclesiastical office in the kingdom, the shoemaker's son, who had grown covetous, and hoped perhaps for a cardinal's hat, determined to temporize. He hid in the abbey of Saint-Germain en Laye.

At his first dinner, Charles IX., not seeing Amyot, asked for him. Some Guisard, no doubt, told the King what had passed between Amyot and the Queen-mother.

"What!" cried he, "has he been made away with because I created him high almoner?"

He went off to his mother in the violent state of a child when one of his fancies is contravened.

"Madame," said he, as he entered her room, "did I not comply with your wishes and sign the letter you asked of me for the Parlement, by virtue of which you govern my kingdom? Did you not promise me, when you laid it before me, that my will should be yours? and now the only favor I have cared to bestow excites your jealousy. The chancellor talks of making me of age at fourteen, three years from hence, and you treat me as a child! By God, but I mean to be King, and as much a King as my father and grandfather were kings!"

The tone and vehemence with which he spoke these words were a revelation to Catherine of her son's true character; it was like a blow from a bludgeon on her heart.

"And he speaks thus to me," thought she, "to me, who made him King. Monsieur," she said, "the business of being King in such times as these is a difficult one, and you do not yet know the master minds you have to deal with. You will never have any true and trustworthy friend but your mother, or other adherents than those whom she long since attached to her, and but for whom you would perhaps not be alive at this day. The Guises are averse both to your position

and your person, I would have you know. If they could sew me up in a sack and throw me into the river," said she, pointing to the Seine, "they would do it to-night. Those Lorrains feel that I am a lioness defending her cubs, and that stays the bold hands they stretch out to clutch the crown. To whom, to what is your preceptor attached? where are his allies? what is his authority? what services can he do you? what weight will his words have? Instead of gaining a buttress to uphold your power, you have undermined it.

"The Cardinal de Lorraine threatens you; he plays the King, and keeps his hat on his head in the presence of the first Prince of the Blood; was it not necessary to counterbalance him with another cardinal, invested with authority equal to his own? Is Amyot, a shoemaker who might tie the bows of his shoes, the man to defy him to his face? Well, well, you are fond of Amyot. You have appointed him! Your first decision shall be respected, my lord! But before deciding any further, have the kindness to consult me. Listen to reasons of State, and your boyish good-sense will perhaps agree with my old woman's experience before deciding, when you know all the difficulties."

"You must bring back my master!" said the King, not listening very carefully to the Queen, on finding her speech full of reproofs.

"Yes, you shall have him," replied she. "But not he, nor even that rough Cypierre, can teach you to reign."

"It is you, my dear mother," he exclaimed, mollified by his triumph, and throwing off the threatening and sly expression which nature had stamped on his physiognomy.

Catherine sent Gondi to find the high almoner. When the Florentine had discovered Amyot's retreat, and the bishop heard that the courtier came from the Queen, he was seized with terror, and would not come out of the abbey. In this extremity Catherine was obliged to write him himself, and in such terms that he came back and obtained the promise of her

support, but only on condition of his obeying her blindly in all that concerned the King.

This little domestic tempest being lulled, Catherine came back to the Louvre. It was more than a year since she had left it, and she now held council with her nearest friends as to how she was to deal with the young King, whom Cypierre had complimented on his firmness.

"What is to be done?" said she to the two Gondis, Ruggieri, Birague, and Chiverni, now tutor and chancellor to the Duc d'Anjou.

"First of all," said Birague, "get rid of Cypierre; he is not a courtier, he will never fall in with your views, and will think he is doing his duty by opposing you."

"Whom can I trust?" cried the Queen.

"One of us," said Birague.

"By my faith," said Gondi, "I promise to make the King as pliant as the King of Navarre."

"You let the late King die to save your other children; well, then, do as the grand Signors of Constantinople do: crush this one's passions and fancies," said Albert de Gondi. "He likes the arts, poetry, hunting, and a little girl he saw at Orleans; all this is quite enough to occupy him."

"Then you would be the King's tutor?" said Catherine, to the more capable of the two Gondis.

"If you will give me the necessary authority; it might be well to make me a marshal of France and a Duke. Cypierre is too small a man to continue in that office. Henceforth the tutor of a King of France should be a marshal and Duke, or something of the kind——"

"He is right," said Birague.

"Poetry and hunting," said Catherine, in a dreamy voice.

"We will hunt and make love!" cried Gondi.

"Beside," said Chiverni, "you are sure of Amyot, who will always be afraid of a drugged cup in case of disobedience, and with Gondi you will have the King in leading strings."

"You were resigned to the loss of one son to save the three others and the Crown; now you must have the courage to keep this one *occupied* to save the kingdom—to save yourself perhaps," said Ruggieri.

"He has just offended me deeply," said Catherine.

"He does not know how much he owes you; and if he did, you would not be safe," Birague replied with grave emphasis.

"It is settled," said the Queen, on whom this reply had a startling effect; "you are to be the King's governor, Gondi. The King must make me a return in favor of one of my friends for the concession I have made for that cowardly bishop. But the fool has lost the cardinal's hat; so long as I live I will hinder the Pope from fitting it to his head! We should have been very strong with Cardinal de Tournon to support us. What a trio they would have made: he, as high almoner, with l'Hôpital and de Thou! As to the citizens of Paris, I mean to make my son coax them over, and we will lean on them."

And Gondi was, in fact, made a marshal, created Duc de Retz and tutor to the King, within a few days.

This little council was just over when Cardinal de Tournon came to announce to the Queen the messengers from Calvin. Admiral Coligny escorted them to secure them respectful treatment at the Louvre. The Queen summoned her battalion of maids of honor, and went into the great reception-room built by her husband, which no longer exists in the Louvre of our day.

At that time the staircase of the Louvre was in the clock-tower. Catherine's rooms were in the older part of the building, part of which survives in the Cour du Musée. The present staircase to the galleries was built where the *Salle des ballets* (dancing hall) was before it. A *ballet* at that time meant a sort of dramatic entertainment performed by all the Court.

Revolutionary prejudice led to the most ridiculous mistake as to Charles IX. *à propos* to the Louvre. During the Revolution a belief defamatory of this King, whose character has been caricatured, made a monster of him. Chénier's tragedy was written under the provocation of a tablet hung up on the window of the part of the palace that projects toward the quay. On it were these words, "From this window Charles IX. of execrable memory fired on the citizens of Paris." It may be well to point out to future historians and studious persons that the whole of that side of the Louvre, now called the Old Louvre—the projecting wing at a right angle to the quay, connecting the galleries with the Louvre by what is called the Galerie d'Apollon, and the Louvre with the Tuileries by the picture gallery—was not in existence in the time of Charles IX. The principal part of the site of the river-front, where lies the garden known as le Jardin de l'Infante, was occupied by the Hôtel de Bourbon, which belonged, in fact, to the House of Navarre. It would have been physically impossible for Charles IX. to fire from the Louvre of Henri II. on a boat full of Huguenots crossing the Seine, though he could see the river from some windows, which are now built up, in that part of the palace.

Even if historians and libraries did not possess maps in which the Louvre at the time of Charles IX. is perfectly shown, the building bears in itself the refutation of the error. The several kings who have contributed to this vast structure have never failed to leave their cypher on the work in some form of monogram. The venerable buildings, now all discolored, of that part of the Louvre that goes down to the quay bear the initials of Henri II. and of Henri IV.; quite different from those of Henri III., who added to his H Catherine's double C in a way that looks like D to superficial observers. It was Henri IV. who was able to add his own palace, the Hôtel de Bourbon, with its gardens and domain, on to the Louvre. He first thought of uniting Catherine de'

Medici's palace to the Louvre by finishing the galleries, of which the exquisite sculpture is too little appreciated.

But if no plan of Paris under Charles IX. were in existence, nor the monograms of the two Henrys, the difference in the architecture would be enough to give the lie to this calumny. The rusticated bosses of the Hôtel de la Force, and of this portion of the Louvre, are precisely characteristic of the transition from the architecture of the Renaissance to the architecture of Henri III., Henri IV., and Louis XIII.

This archæological digression, in harmony, to be sure, with the pictures at the beginning of this narrative, enables us to see the aspect of this other part of Paris, of which nothing now remains but that portion of the Louvre, where the beautiful bas-reliefs are perishing day by day.

When the Court was informed that the Queen was about to give audience to Théodore de Bèze and Chaudieu, introduced by Admiral Coligny, every one who had a right to go into the throne-room hastened to be present at this interview. It was about six o'clock; Admiral Coligny had supped, and was picking his teeth as he walked upstairs between the two Calvinists. This playing with a toothpick was a confirmed habit with the admiral; he involuntarily picked his teeth in the middle of a battle when meditating a retreat. "Never trust the admiral's toothpick, the constable's 'No,' nor Catherine's 'Yes,'" was one of the proverbs of the Court at the time. And after the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, the mob made horrible mockery of the admiral's body, which hung for three days at Montfaucon, by sticking a grotesque toothpick between his teeth. Chroniclers have recorded this hideous jest. And, indeed, this trivial detail in the midst of a tremendous catastrophe is just like the Paris mob, which thoroughly deserves this grotesque parody of a line of Boileau's:

"Le Français, né malin, créa la guillotine."

Or: The Frenchman, a born wag, invented the guillotine.

In all ages, the Parisians have made fun before, during, and after the most terrible revolutions.

Théodore de Bèze was in Court dress, black silk long-hose, slashed shoes, full trunks, a doublet of black silk, also slashed, and a little, black velvet cloak, over which fell a fine white ruff, deeply gauffered. He wore the tuft of beard called a *virgule* (a comma) and a mustache, his sword hung by his side, and he carried a cane. All who know the pictures at Versailles, or the portraits by Odieuvre, know his round and almost jovial face, with bright eyes, and the remarkably high and broad forehead, which is characteristic of the poets and writers of that time. De Bèze had a pleasant face, which did him good service. He formed a striking contrast to Coligny, whose austere features are known to all, and to the bitter and bilious-looking Chaudieu, who wore the preacher's gown and Calvinist bands.

The state of affairs in the Chamber of Deputies in our own day, and that, no doubt, in the Convention too, may enable us to understand how at that Court and at that time persons, who six months after would be fighting to the death and waging heinous warfare, would meanwhile meet, address each other with courtesy, and exchange jests.

When Coligny entered the room, Birague, who would coldly advise the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, and the Cardinal de Lorraine, who would tell his servant Besme not to miss the admiral, came forward to meet him, and the Piedmontese said, with a smile—

"Well, my dear admiral, so you have undertaken to introduce these gentlemen from Geneva?"

"And you will count it to me for a crime perhaps," replied the admiral in jest, "while, if you had undertaken it, you would have scored it as a merit."

"Master Calvin, I hear, is very ill," said the Cardinal de Lorraine to Théodore de Bèze. "I hope we shall not be suspected of having stirred his broth for him!"

"Nay, monseigneur, you would lose too much by that," said Théodore de Bèze shrewdly.

The Duc de Guise, who was examining Chaudieu, stared at his brother and Birague, who were both startled by this speech.

"By God!" exclaimed the cardinal, "heretics are of the right faith in keen politics!"

To avoid difficulties, the Queen, who was announced at this moment, remained standing. She began by conversing with the connétable, who spoke eagerly of the scandal of her admitting Calvin's envoys to her presence.

"But, you see, my dear constable, we receive them without ceremony."

"Madame," said the admiral, approaching Catherine, "these are the two doctors of the new religion who have come to an understanding with Calvin, and have taken his instructions as to a meeting where the various churches of France may compromise their differences."

"This is Monsieur Théodore de Bèze, my wife's very great favorite," said the King of Navarre, coming forward and taking de Bèze by the hand.

"And here is Chaudieu!" cried the Prince de Condé. "My friend the Duc de Guise knows the captain," he added, looking at le Balafré; "perhaps he would like to make acquaintance with the minister."

This sally made everybody laugh, even Catherine.

"By my troth," said the Duc de Guise, "I am delighted to see a man who can so well choose a follower, and make use of him in his degree. One of your men," said he to the preacher, "endured, without dying or confessing anything, the extreme of torture; I fancy myself brave, but I do not know that I could endure so well!"

"Hm!" observed Ambroise Paré, "you said not a word when I pulled the spear out of your face at Calais."

Catherine, in the middle of the semicircle formed right and

left of the maids of honor and Court officials, kept silence. While looking at the two famous Reformers, she was trying to penetrate them with her fine, intelligent, black eyes, and study them thoroughly.

"One might be the sheath and the other the blade," Albert de Gondi said in her ear.

"Well, gentlemen," said Catherine, who could not help smiling, "has your master given you liberty to arrange a public conference where you may convert to the Word of God those modern fathers of the church who are the glory of our realm?"

"We have no master but the Lord," said Chaudieu.

"Well, you acknowledge some authority in the King of France?" said Catherine, smiling, and interrupting the minister.

"And a great deal in the Queen," added de Bèze, bowing low.

"You will see," she went on, "that the heretics will be my most dutiful subjects."

"Oh, madame," cried Coligny, "what a splendid kingdom we will make for you! Europe reaps great profit from our divisions. It has seen one-half of France set against the other for fifty years past."

"Have we come here to hear chants in praise of heretics?" said the constable roughly.

"No, but to bring them to amendment," answered the Cardinal de Lorraine in a whisper, "and we hope to achieve it by a little gentleness."

"Do you know what I should have done in the reign of the King's father?" said Anne de Montmorency. "I should have sent for the provost to hang those two rascals high and dry on the Louvre gallows."

"Well, gentlemen, and who are the learned doctors you will bring into the field?" asked the Queen, silencing the constable with a look.

"Duplessis-Mornay and Théodore de Bèze are our leaders," said Chaudieu.

"The Court will probably go to the Castle of Saint-Germain; and as it would not be seemly that this colloquy should take place in the same town, it shall be held in the little town of Poissy," replied Catherine.

"Shall we be safe there, madame?" asked Chaudieu.

"Oh!" said the Queen, with a sort of simplicity, "you will, no doubt, know what precautions to take. Monsieur the Admiral will make arrangements to that effect with my cousins de Guise and Montmorency."

"Fie on it all!" said the constable; "I will have no part in it."

The Queen took Chaudieu a little way apart.

"What do you do to your sectarians to give them such a spirit?" said she. "My furrier's son was really sublime," she added.

"We have faith," said Chaudieu.

At this moment the room was filled with eager groups, all discussing the question of this assembly, which, from the Queen's suggestion, was already spoken of as the "Convocation of Poissy."

Catherine looked at Chaudieu, and felt it safe to say—

"Yes, a new faith."

"Ah, madame, if you were not blinded by your connection with the Court of Rome, you would see that we are returning to the true doctrine of Jesus Christ, who, while sanctifying the equality of souls, has given all men on earth equal rights."

"And do you think yourself the equal of Calvin?" said Catherine shrewdly. "Nay, nay, we are equals only in church. What, really? Break all bonds between the people and the throne?" cried Catherine. "You are not merely heretics; you rebel against obedience to the King while avoiding all obedience to the Pope."

She sharply turned away, and returned to Théodore de Bèze.

"I trust to you, monsieur," she said, "to carry through this conference conscientiously. Take time over it."

"I fancied," said Chaudieu to the Prince de Condé, the King of Navarre, and Admiral Coligny, "that affairs of State were taken more seriously."

"Oh, we all know exactly what we mean," said the Prince de Condé, with a significant glance at Théodore de Bèze.

The hunchback took leave of his followers to keep an assignation. This great Prince and party leader was one of the most successful gallants of the Court; the two handsomest women of the day fought for him with such infatuation that the Maréchale de Saint-André, the wife of one of the coming Triumvirate, gave him her fine estate of Saint-Valery to win him from the Duchesse de Guise, the wife of the man who had wanted to bring his head under the axe; being unable to wean the Duc de Nemours from his flirtations with Mademoiselle de Rohan, she fell in love, meanwhile, with the leader of the Reformed party.

"How different from Geneva!" said Chaudieu to Théodore de Bèze on the little bridge by the Louvre.

"They are livelier here, and I cannot imagine why they are such traitors," replied de Bèze.

"Meet a traitor with a traitor-and-a-half," said Chaudieu in a whisper. "I have saints in Paris that I can rely on, and I mean to make a prophet of Calvin. Christophe will rid us of the most dangerous of our enemies."

"The Queen-mother, for whom the poor wretch endured torture, has already had him passed, by high-handed orders, as pleader before the Parlement, and lawyers are more apt to be tell-tales than assassins. Remember Avenelles, who sold the secret of our first attempt to take up arms."

"But I know Christophe," said Chaudieu, with an air of conviction, as he and the Calvinist ambassador parted.

Some days after the reception of Calvin's secret envoys by Catherine, and toward the end of that year—for the year then began at Easter, and the modern calendar was not adopted until this very reign—Christophe, still stretched on an arm-chair, was sitting on that side of the large sombre room where our story began, in such a position as to look out on the river. His feet rested on a stool. Mademoiselle Lecamus and Babette Lallier had just renewed the application of compresses, soaked in a lotion brought by Ambroise, to whose care Catherine had commended Christophe. When once he was restored to his family, the lad had become the object of the most devoted care. Babette, with her father's permission, came to the house every morning and did not leave until the evening. Christophe, a subject of wonder to the apprentices, gave rise in the neighborhood to endless tales, which involved him in poetic mystery. He had been put to torture, and the famous Ambroise Paré was exerting all his skill to save him. What, then, had he done to be treated so? On this point neither Christophe nor his father breathed a word. Catherine, now all-powerful, had an interest in keeping silence, and so had the Prince de Condé. The visits of Ambroise Paré, the surgeon to the King and to the House of Guise, permitted by the Queen-mother and the Princes of Lorraine to attend a youth accused of heresy, added to the singularity of this business, which no one could see through. And then the priest of Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs came several times to see his church-warden's son, and these visits made the causes of Christophe's condition even more inexplicable.

The old furrier, who had a plan of his own, replied evasively when his fellows of the guild, traders, and friends spoke of his son—

"I am very happy, neighbor, to have been able to save him! You know! it is well not to put your finger between the wood and the bark. My son put his hand to the stake and took out fire enough to burn my house down! They im-

posed on his youth, and we citizens never get anything but scorn and harm by hanging on to the great. This quite determines me to make a lawyer of my boy; the law courts will teach him to weigh his words and deeds. The young Queen, who is now in Scotland, had a great deal to do with it; but perhaps Christophe was very imprudent too. I went through terrible grief. All this will probably lead to my retiring from business; I will never go to Court any more. My son has had enough of the Reformation now; it has left him with broken arms and legs. But for Ambroise, where should I be?"

Thanks to these speeches, and to his prudence, a report was spread in the neighborhood that Christophe no longer followed the creed of Colas. Every one thought it quite natural that the old Syndic should wish to see his son a lawyer in the Parlement, and thus the priest's calls seemed quite a matter of course. In thinking of the old man's woes, no one thought of his ambition, which would have been deemed monstrous.

The young lawyer, who had spent ninety days on the bed put up for him in the old sitting-room, had only been out of it for a week past, and still needed the help of crutches to enable him to walk. Babette's affection and his mother's tenderness had touched Christophe deeply; still, having him in bed, the two women lectured him soundly on the subject of religion. Président de Thou came to see his godson, and was most paternal. Christophe, as a pleader in the Parlement, ought to be a Catholic, he would be pledged to it by his oath; and the president, who never seemed to doubt the young man's orthodoxy, added these important words—

"You have been cruelly tested, my boy. I myself know nothing of the reasons Messieurs de Guise had for treating you thus; but now I exhort you to live quietly henceforth and not to interfere in broils, for the favor of the King and Queen will not be shown to such as brew storms. You are not a great enough man to drive a bargain with the King, like the Duke and the cardinal. If you want to be councilor

in the Parlement some day, you can only attain that high office by serious devotion to the cause of royalty."

However, neither Monsieur de Thou's visit, nor Babette's charms, nor the entreaties of Madame Lecamus, his mother, had shaken the faith of the Protestant martyr. Christophe clung all the more stoutly to his religion in proportion to what he had suffered for it.

"My father will never allow me to marry a heretic," said Babette in his ear.

Christophe replied only with tears, which left the pretty girl speechless and thoughtful.

Old Lecamus maintained his dignity as a father and a Syndic; watched his son, and said little. The old man, having got back his dear Christophe, was almost vexed with himself, and repentant of having displayed all his affection for his only son; but secretly he admired him. At no time in his life had the furrier pulled so many wires to gain his ends; for he could see the ripe harvest of the crop sown with so much toil, and wished to gather it all.

A few days since he had had a long conversation with Christophe alone, hoping to discover the secret of his son's tenacity. Christophe, who was not devoid of ambition, believed in the Prince de Condé. The Prince's generous speech —which was no more than the stock-in-trade of princes—was stamped on his heart. He did not know that Condé had wished him at the devil at the moment when he bid him such a touching farewell through the bars of his prison at Orleans.

"A Gascon would have understood," the Prince had said to himself.

And in spite of his admiration for the Prince, Christophe cherished the deepest respect for Catherine, the great Queen who had explained to him in a look that she was compelled by necessity to sacrifice him, and then, during his torture, had conveyed to him in another glance an unlimited promise by an almost imperceptible tear.

During the deep calm of the ninety days and nights he had spent in recovering, the newly made lawyer thought over the events at Blois and at Orleans. He weighed, in spite of himself, it may be said, the influence of these two patrons; he hesitated between the Queen and the Prince. He had certainly done more for Catherine than for the Reformation; and the young man's heart and mind, of course, went forth to the Queen, less by reason of this difference than because she was a woman. In such a case a man will always found his hopes on a woman rather than on a man.

"I immolated myself for her—what will she not do for me?"

This was the question he almost involuntarily asked himself as he recalled the tone in which she had said, "My poor boy!"

It is difficult to conceive of the pitch of self-consciousness reached by a man alone and sick in bed. Everything, even the care of which he is the object, tends to make him think of himself alone. By exaggerating the Prince de Condé's obligations to him, Christophe looked forward to obtaining some post at the Court of Navarre. The lad, a novice still in politics, was all the more forgetful of the anxieties which absorb party leaders, and of the swift rush of men and events which overrule them, because he lived almost in solitary imprisonment in that dark parlor. Every party is bound to be ungrateful when it is fighting for dear life; and when it has won the day, there are so many persons to be rewarded, that it is ungrateful still. The rank and file submit to this oblivion, but the captains turn against the new master who for so long has marched as their equal.

Christophe, the only person to remember what he had suffered, already reckoned himself as one of the chiefs of the Reformation by considering himself as one of its martyrs. Lecamus, the old wolf of trade, acute and clear-sighted, had guessed his son's secret thoughts; indeed, all his manœuvring

was based on the very natural hesitancy that possessed the lad.

"Would it not be fine," he had said the day before to Babette, "to be the wife of a councilor to the Parlement? you would be addressed as madame."

"You are crazy, neighbor," said Lallier. "In the first place, where would you find ten thousand crowns a year in landed estate, which a councilor must show, and from whom could you purchase a connection? The Queen-mother and Regent would have to give all her mind to it to get your son into the Parlement; and he smells of the stake too strongly to be admitted."

"What would you give, now, to see your daughter a councilor's wife?"

"You want to sound the depth of my purse, you old fox!" exclaimed Lallier.

Councilor to the Parlement! The words distracted Christophe's brain.

Long after the conference was over, one morning when Christophe sat gazing at the river, which reminded him of the scene that was the beginning of all this story, of the Prince de Condé, la Renaudie, and Chaudieu, of his journey to Blois, and of all he hoped for, the Syndic came to sit down by his son with ill-disguised glee under an affectation of solemnity.

"My boy," said he, "after what took place between you and the heads of the riot at Amboise, they owed you so much that your future might very well be cared for by the House of Navarre."

"Yes," replied Christophe.

"Well," his father went on, "I have definitely applied for permission for you to purchase a legal business in Béarn.* Our good friend Paré undertook to transmit the letters I wrote in your name to the Prince de Condé and Queen Jeanne.

* Then a province of Navarre-Gascony.

Here, read this reply from Monsieur de Pibrac, Vice-Chancellor of Navarre:

"*To Master Lecamus, Syndic of the Guild of Furriers.*

"His Highness the Prince de Condé bids me express to you his regret at being unable to do anything for his fellow-prisoner in the Tour de Saint-Aignan, whom he remembers well, and to whom, for the present, he offers the place of man-at-arms in his own company, where he will have the opportunity of making his way as a man of good heart—which he is.

"The Queen of Navarre hopes for an occasion of rewarding Master Christophe, and will not fail.

"And with this, Monsieur le Syndic, I pray God have you in His keeping. PIBRAC,

"*Chancellor of Navarre.*

"Nérac."

"Nérac! Pibrac! Crac!" cried Babette. "There is nothing to be gotten out of these Gascons; they think only of themselves."

Old Lecamus was looking at his son with ironical amusement.

"And he wants to set a poor boy on horseback whose knees and ankles were pounded up for him!" cried the mother. "What a shameful mockery!"

"I do not seem to see you as a councilor in Navarre," said the old furrier.

"I should like to know what Queen Catherine would do for me if I petitioned her," said Christophe, much crestfallen.

"She made no promises," said the old merchant, "but I am sure she would not make a fool of you and would remember your sufferings. Still, how could she make a councilor-at-law of a Protestant citizen?"

"But Christophe has never abjured!" exclaimed Babettte. "He may surely keep his own secret as to his religious opinions."

"The Prince de Condé would be less scornful of a councilor to the Parlement of Paris," said Lecamus.

"A councilor, father! Is it possible?"

"Yes, if you do nothing to upset what I am managing for you. My neighbor Lallier here is ready to pay two hundred thousand livres, if I add as much again, for the purchase of a fine estate entailed on the heirs male, which we will hand over to you."

"And I will add something more for a house in Paris," said Lallier.

"Well, Christophe?" said Babette.

"You are talking without the Queen," replied the young lawyer.

Some days after this bitter mortification, an apprentice brought this brief note to Christophe—

"Chaudieu wishes to see his son."

"Bring him in," said Christophe.

"O my saint and martyr!" cried the preacher, embracing the young man, "have you gotten over your sufferings?"

"Yes, thanks to Paré!"

"Thanks to God, who gave you strength to endure them! But what is this I hear? You have passed as a pleader, you have taken the oath of fidelity, you have confessed the Whore, the Catholic Apostolic, Romish Church?"

"My father insisted."

"But are we not to leave father and mother and children and wife for the sacred cause of Calvinism, and to suffer all things? Oh, Christophe, Calvin, the great Calvin, the whole party, the whole world, the future counts on your courage and your greatness of soul! We want your life."

There is this strange feature in the mind of man: the most devoted, even in the act of devoting himself, always builds

up a romance of hope even in the most perilous crisis. Thus, when on the river under the Pont au Change, the prince, the soldier, and the preacher had required Christophe to carry to Queen Catherine the document which, if discovered, would have cost him his life, the boy had trusted to his wit, to chance, to his perspicacity, and had boldly marched on between the two formidable parties—the Guises and the Queen—who had so nearly crushed him. While in the torture chamber he still had said to himself, "I shall live through it—it is only pain!"

But at this brutal command, "Die!" to a man who was still helpless, hardly recovered from the injuries he had suffered, and who clung all the more to life for having seen death so near, it was impossible to indulge in any such illusions.

Christophe calmly asked, "What do you want of me?"

"To fire a pistol bravely, as Stewart fired at Minard."

"At whom?"

"The Duc de Guise."

"Assassination?"

"Revenge! Have you forgotten the hundred gentlemen massacred on one scaffold! A child, little d'Aubigné, said as he saw the butchery, 'They have beheaded all France.'"

"We are to take blows and not return them is the teaching of the Gospel," replied Christophe. "If we are to imitate the Catholics, of what use is it to reform the church?"

"Oh, Christophe, they have made a lawyer of you, and you argue!" said Chaudieu.

"No, my friend," the youth replied. "But principles are ungrateful, and you and yours will only be the playthings of the House of Bourbon."

"Oh, Christophe, if you had only heard Calvin, you would know that we can turn them like a glove! The Bourbons are the glove, and we the hand."

"Read this," said Christophe, handing Pibrac's letter to the minister.

"Alas, boy! you are ambitious; you can no longer sacrifice yourself;" and Chaudieu went away.

Not long after this visit, Christophe, with the families of Lallier and Lecamus, had met to celebrate the plighting of Babette and Christophe in the old parlor, whence Christophe's couch was removed, for he could now climb the stairs, and was beginning to drag himself about without crutches. It was nine in the evening, and they waited for Ambroise Paré. The family notary was sitting at a table covered with papers. The furrier was selling his house and business to his head-clerk, who was to pay forty thousand livres down for the house, and to mortgage it as security for the stock-in-trade, beside paying twenty thousand livres on account.

Lecamus had purchased for his son a magnificent house in the Rue de Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs, built of stone by Philibert de l'Orme, as a wedding gift. The Syndic had also spent two hundred and fifty thousand livres out of his fortune, Lallier paying an equal sum, for the acquisition of a fine manor and estate in Picardy, for which five hundred thousand livres were asked. This estate being a dependence of the Crown, letters patent from the King—called letters of rescript—were necessary, beside the payment of considerable fines and fees. Thus the actual marriage was to be postponed till the royal signature could be obtained.

Though the citizens of Paris had obtained the right of purchasing manors and lands, the prudence of the Privy Council had placed certain restrictions on the transfer of lands belonging to the Crown; and the estate on which Lecamus had had his eye for the last ten years was one of these. Ambroise had undertaken to produce the necessary permission this very evening. Old Lecamus went to and fro between the sitting-room and the front door with an impatience that showed the eagerness of his ambition.

At last Ambroise appeared.

"My good friend!" exclaimed the surgeon in a great fuss, and looking at the supper-table, "what is your napery like? Very good. Now bring waxlights, and make haste, make haste. Bring out the best of everything you have."

"What is the matter?" asked the priest of Saint-Pierre aux Bœufs.

"The Queen-mother and the King are coming to sup with you," replied the surgeon. "The Queen and King expect to meet here an old councilor, whose business is to be sold to Christophe, and Monsieur de Thou, who has managed the bargain. Do not look as if you expected them; I stole out of the Louvre."

In an instant all were astir. Christophe's mother and Babette's aunt trotted about in all the flurry of housewives taken by surprise. In spite of the confusion into which the announcement had thrown the party, preparations were made with miraculous energy. Christophe, amazed, astounded, overpowered by such condescension, stood speechless, looking on at all the bustle.

"The Queen and the King here!" said the old mother.

"The Queen?" echoed Babette; "but what for, what to do?"

Within an hour everything was altered; the old room was smartened up, the table shone. A sound of horses was heard in the street. The gleam of torches carried by the mounted escort brought all the neighbors' noses to the windows. The rush was soon over; no one was left under the arcade but the Queen-mother and her son, King Charles IX., Charles de Gondi, master of the wardrobe and tutor to the King; Monsieur de Thou, the retiring councilor; Pinard, secretary of state; and two pages.

"Good people," said the Queen as she went in, "the King, my son, and I have come to sign the marriage-contract of our furrier's son, but on condition that he remains a Catholic. Only a Catholic can serve in the Parlement, only a

Catholic can own lands dependent on the Crown, only a Catholic can sit at table with the King—what do you say, Pinard?"

The secretary of state stepped forward, holding the letters patent.

"If we are not all Catholics here," said the little King, "Pinard will throw all the papers into the fire; but we are all Catholics?" he added, looking round proudly enough at the company.

"Yes, Sire," said Christophe Lecamus, bending the knee, not without difficulty, and kissing the hand the young King held out to him.

Queen Catherine, who also held out her hand to Christophe, pulled him up rather roughly, and leading him into a corner, said—

"Understand, boy, no subterfuges! We are playing an honest game?"

"Yes, madame," he said, dazzled by the splendid reward and by the honor the grateful Queen had done him.

"Well, then, Master Lecamus, the King, my son, and I permit you to purchase the offices and appointments of this good man Groslay, councilor to the Parlement, who is here?" said the Queen. "I hope, young man, that you will follow in the footsteps of your lord president."

De Thou came forward and said—

"I will answer for him, madame."

"Very well, then proceed, notary," said Pinard.

"Since the King, our master, does us the honor of signing my daughter's marriage-contract," cried Lallier, "I will pay the whole price of the estate."

"The ladies may be seated," said the young King graciously. "As a wedding gift to the bride, with my mother's permission, I remit my fines and fees."

Old Lecamus and Lallier fell on their knees and kissed the boy-King's hand.

"By heaven, Sire, what loads of money these citizens have!" said Gondi in his ear.

And the young King laughed.

"Their majesties being so graciously inclined," said old Lecamus, "will they allow me to present to them my successor in the business, and grant him the royal patent as furrier to their majesties?"

"Let us see him," said the King, and Lecamus brought forward his successor, who was white with alarm.

Old Lecamus was shrewd enough to offer the young King a silver cup which he had bought from Benvenuto Cellini* when he was staying in Paris at the Tour de Nesle, at a cost of not less than two thousand crowns.

"Oh, mother! what a fine piece of work!" cried the youth, lifting the cup by its foot.

"It is Florentine," said Catherine.

"Pardon me, madame," said Lecamus; "it was made in France, though by a Florentine. If it had come from Florence, it should have been the Queen's; but being made in France, it is the King's."

"I accept it, my friend," cried Charles IX., "and henceforth I drink out of it."

"It is good enough," the Queen remarked, "to be included among the Crown treasure."

"And you, Master Ambroise," she went on in an undertone, turning to the surgeon, and pointing to Christophe, "have you cured him! Will he walk?"

"He will fly," said the surgeon, with a smile. "You have stolen him from us very cleverly!"

"The abbey will not starve for lack of one monk!" replied the Queen, in the frivolous tone for which she has been blamed, but which lay only on the surface.

The supper was cheerful; the Queen thought Babette pretty, and, like the great lady she was, she slipped a diamond ring

* A noted sculptor, engraver, and goldsmith.

"YOU ARE A LOYAL SUBJECT," SAID CATHERINE.

on the girl's finger in compensation for the value of the silver cup.

King Charles IX., who afterward was perhaps rather too fond of thus invading his subjects' homes, supped with a good appetite; then, on a word from his new tutor, who had been instructed, it is said, to efface the virtuous teaching of Cypierre, he incited the president of Parlement, the old retired councilor, the secretary of state, the priest, the notary, and the citizens to drink so deep that Queen Catherine rose to go at the moment when she saw that their high spirits were becoming uproarious.

As the Queen rose, Christophe, his father, and the two women took up tapers to light her as far as the door of the store. Then Christophe made so bold as to pull the Queen's wide sleeve and give her a meaning look. Catherine stopped, dismissed the old man and the women with a wave of her hand, and said to the young man—"What?"

"If you can make any use of the information, madame," said he, speaking close to the Queen's ear, "I can tell you that assassins are plotting against the Duc de Guise's life."

"You are a loyal subject," said Catherine with a smile, "and I will never forget you."

She held out her hand, famous for its beauty, drawing off her glove as a mark of special favor. And Christophe, as he kissed that exquisite hand, was more Royalist than ever.

"Then I shall be rid of that wretch without my having anything to do with it," was her reflection as she put on her glove.

She mounted her mule and returned to the Louvre with her two pages.

Christophe drank, but he was gloomy; Paré's austere face reproached him for his apostasy; however, later events justified the old Syndic. Christophe would certainly never have escaped in the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew; his wealth and lands would have attracted the butchers. History has

recorded the cruel fate of the wife of Lallier's successor, a beautiful woman, whose naked body remained hanging by the hair for three days to one of the starlings of the Pont au Change. Babette could shudder then as she reflected that such a fate might have been hers if Christophe had remained a Calvinist, as the Reformers were soon generally called. Calvin's ambition was fulfilled, but not until after his death.

This was the origin of the famous Lecamus family of lawyers. Tallemant des Réaux was mistaken in saying they had come from Picardy. It was afterward to the interest of the Lecamus family to refer their beginning to the time when they had acquired their principal estate, situated in that province.

Christophe's son, and his successor under Louis XIII., was father of that rich Président Lecamus, who in Louis XIV.'s time built the magnificent mansion which divided with the Hôtel Lambert the admiration of Parisians and foreigners, and which is certainly one of the finest buildings in Paris. This house still exists in the Rue de Thorigny, though it was pillaged at the beginning of the Revolution, as belonging to Monsieur de Juigné, archbishop of Paris. All the paintings were then defaced, and the lodgers who have since dwelt there have still further damaged it. This fine residence, earned in the old house in the Rue de la Pelleterie, still shows what splendid results were then the outcome of family spirit. We may be allowed to doubt whether modern individualism, resulting from the repeated equal division of property, will ever raise such edifices.

PART II.

THE RUGGIERI'S SECRET.

Between eleven o'clock and midnight, toward the end of October, 1573, two Florentines, brothers, Albert de Gondi, marshal of France, and Charles de Gondi la Tour, master of the wardrobe to King Charles IX., were sitting at the top of a house in the Rue Saint-Honoré on the edge of the gutter. Such gutters were made of stone; they ran along below the roof to catch the rain-water, and were pierced here and there with long gargoyles carved in the form of grotesque creatures with gaping jaws. In spite of the zeal of the present generation in the destruction of ancient houses, there were still in Paris many such gutter-spouts when, not long since, the police regulations as to waste-pipes led to their disappearance. A few sculptured gutters are still to be seen in the Saint-Antoine quarter, where the low rents have kept owners from adding rooms in the roof.

It may seem strange that two persons invested with such important functions should have chosen a perch more befitting cats. But to any one who has hunted through the historical curiosities of that time, and seen how many interests were complicated about the throne, so that the domestic politics of France can only be compared to a tangled skein of thread, these two Florentines are really cats, and quite in their place in a gutter. The devotion to the person of Catherine de' Medici, who had transplanted them to the French Court, required them to shirk none of the consequences of their intrusion there.

But to explain how and why these two courtiers were perched up there, it will be necessary to relate a scene which had just taken place within a stone's throw of this gutter, at

the Louvre, in the fine brown room—which is, perhaps, all that remains of Henri II.'s apartments—where the Court was in attendance after supper on the two Queens and the King. At that time middle-class folk supped at six o'clock, and men of rank at seven; but people of exquisite fashion supped between eight and nine; it was the meal we nowadays call dinner.

Some people have supposed that etiquette was the invention of Louis XIV.; but this is a mistake; it was introduced into France by Catherine de' Medici, who was so exacting that the Connétable Anne de Montmorency had more difficulty in obtaining leave to ride into the courtyard of the Louvre than in winning his sword, and even then the permission was granted only on the score of his great age. Etiquette was slightly relaxed under the first three Bourbon Kings, but assumed an Oriental character under Louis the Great, for it was derived from the Lower Empire, which borrowed it from Persia. In 1573 not only had very few persons a right to enter the courtyard of the Louvre with their attendants and torches, just as in Louis XIV.'s time only dukes and peers might drive under the porch, but the functions which gave the privilege of attending their majesties after supper could easily be counted. The Maréchal de Retz, whom we have just seen keeping watch on the gutter, once offered a thousand crowns of that day to the clerk of the closet to get speech of Henry III. at an hour when he had no right of *entrée*. And how a certain venerable historian mocks at a view of the courtyard of the Castle of Blois, into which the draughtsman introduced the figure of a man on horseback!

At this hour, then, there were at the Louvre none but the most eminent persons in the kingdom. Queen Elizabeth of Austria and her mother-in-law, Catherine de' Medici, were seated to the left of the fireplace. In the opposite corner the King, sunk in his armchair, affected an apathy excusable on the score of digestion, for he had eaten like a prince returned

from hunting. Possibly, too, he wished to avoid speech in the presence of so many persons whose interest it was to detect his thoughts.

The courtiers stood, hat in hand, at the farther end of the room. Some conversed in undertones; others kept an eye on the King, hoping for a glance or a word. One, being addressed by the Queen-mother, conversed with her for a few minutes. Another would be so bold as to speak a word to Charles IX., who replied with a nod or a short answer. A German noble, the Count of Solern, was standing in the chimney-corner by the side of Charles V.'s grand-daughter, with whom he had come to France. Near the young Queen, seated on a stool, was her lady-in-waiting, the Countess Fieschi, a Strozzi, and related to Catherine. The beautiful Madame de Sauves, a descendant of Jacques Cœur, and mistress in succession of the King of Navarre, of the King of Poland, and of the Duc d'Alençon, had been invited to supper, but she remained standing, her husband being merely a secretary of state. Behind these two ladies were the Gondis, talking to them. They alone were laughing of all the dull assembly. Gondi, made Duc de Retz and Gentleman of the Bedchamber, since obtaining the marshal's bâton though he had never commanded an army, had been sent as the King's proxy to be married to the Queen at Spires. This honor plainly indicated that he, like his brother, was one of the few persons whom the King and Queen admitted to a certain familiarity.

On the King's side the most conspicuous figure was the Meréchal de Tavannes, who was at Court on business; Neufville de Villeroy, one of the shrewdest negotiators of the time, who laid the foundation of the fortunes of his family; Messieurs de Birague and de Chiverni, one in attendance on the Queen-mother, the other Chancellor of Anjou and of Poland, who, knowing Catherine's favoritism, had attached himself to Henry III., the brother whom Charles IX. regarded

as an enemy; Strozzi, a cousin of Queen Catherine, and a few more gentlemen, among whom were to be noted the old Cardinal de Lorraine and his nephew, the young Duc de Guise, both very much kept at a distance by Catherine and by the King. These two chiefs of the Holy Alliance, afterward known as the League, established some years since with Spain, made a display of the submission of servants who await their opportunity to become the masters; Catherine and Charles IX. were watching each other with mutual attention.

At this Court—as gloomy as the room in which it had assembled—each one had reasons for sadness or absence of mind. The young Queen was enduring all the torments of jealousy, and disguised them ineffectually by attempting to smile at her husband, whom she adored as a pious woman of infinite kindness. Marie Touchet, Charles IX.'s only mistress, to whom he was chivalrously faithful, had come home a month since from the Castle of Fayet, in Dauphiné, whither she had retired for the birth of her child; and she had brought back with her the only son Charles IX. ever had—Charles, at first Comte d'Auvergne and afterward Duc d'Angoulême.

Beside the grief of seeing her rival the mother of the King's son, while she had only a daughter, the poor Queen was enduring the mortification of complete desertion. During his mistress' absence, the King had made it up with his wife with a vehemence which history mentions as one of the causes of his death. Thus Marie Touchet's return made the pious Austrian Princess understand how little her husband's heart had been concerned in his love-making. Nor was this the only disappointment the young Queen had to endure in this matter; till now Catherine de' Medici had seemed to be her friend; but, in fact, her mother-in-law, for political ends, had encouraged her son's infidelity, and preferred to support the mistress rather than the wife. And this is the reason why:

When Charles IX. first confessed his passion for Marie

Touchet, Catherine looked with favor on the girl for reasons affecting her own prospects of dominion. Marie Touchet was brought to Court at a very early age, at the time of life when a girl's best feelings are in their bloom; she loved the King passionately for his own sake. Terrified at the gulf into which ambition had overthrown the Duchesse de Valentinois, better known as Diane de Poitiers, she was afraid too, no doubt, of Queen Catherine, and preferred happiness to splendor. She thought, perhaps, that a pair of lovers so young as she and the King were could not hold their own against the Queen-mother.

And, indeed, Marie, the only child of Jean Touchet, the lord of Beauvais and le Quillard, King's councilor and lieutenant of the bailiwick of Orleans, half-way between the citizen class and the lowest nobility, was neither altogether a noble nor altogether *bourgeoise*, and was probably ignorant of the objects of innate ambition aimed at by the Pisseleus and the Saint-Valliers, women of family who were struggling for their families with the secret weapons of love. Marie Touchet, alone and of no rank, spared Catherine de' Medici the annoyance of finding in her son's mistress the daughter of some great house who might have set up for her rival.

Jean Touchet, a wit in his day, to whom some poets dedicated their works, wanted nothing of the Court. Marie, a young creature, with no following, as clever and well informed as she was simple and artless, suited the Queen-mother to admiration and won her warm affection.

In point of fact, Catherine persuaded the Parlement to acknowledge the son which Marie Touchet bore to the King in the month of April, and she granted him the title of Comte d'Auvergne, promising the King that she would leave the boy her personal estate, the Counties of Auvergne and Lauraguais. Afterward, Marguerite, Queen of Navarre, disputed the gift when she became Queen of France, and annulled it; but later still, Louis XIII., out of respect to the royal blood of the

Valois, indemnified the Comte d'Auvergne by making him Duc d'Angoulême.

Catherine had already given Marie Touchet, who asked for nothing, the manor of Belleville, an estate without a title, near Vincennes, whither she came when, after hunting, the King slept at that royal residence. Charles IX. spent the greater part of his later days in that gloomy fortress, and, according to some authors, ended his days there as Louis XII. had ended his. Though it was very natural that a lover so entirely captivated should lavish on the woman he adored fresh proofs of affection when he had to expiate his legitimate infidelities, Catherine, after driving her son back to his wife's arms, certainly pleaded for Marie Touchet as women can, and had won the King back to his mistress again. Whatever could keep Charles IX. employed in anything but politics was pleasing to Catherine; and the kind intentions she expressed toward this child for the moment deceived Charles IX., who was beginning to regard her as his enemy.

The motives on which Catherine acted in this business escaped the discernment of the Queen, who, according to Brantôme, was one of the gentlest Queens that ever reigned, and who did no harm nor displeasure to any one, even reading her Hours in secret. But this innocent Princess began to perceive what gulfs yawn round a throne, a terrible discovery which might well make her feel giddy; and some still worse feeling must have inspired her reply to one of her ladies, who, at the King's death, observed to her that if she had had a son she would be Queen-mother and Regent—

"Ah, God be praised that He never gave me a son! What would have come of it? The poor child would have been robbed, as they tried to rob the King my husband, and I should have been the cause of it. God has had mercy on the kingdom and has ordered everything for the best."

This Princess, of whom Brantôme thinks he has given an ample description when he had said that she had a complexion

of face as fine and delicate as that of the ladies of her Court, and very pleasing, and that she had a beautiful shape though but of middle height, was held of small account at the Court; and the King's state affording her an excuse for her double grief, her demeanor added to the gloomy hues of a picture to which a young Queen less cruelly stricken than she was might have given some brightness. The pious Elizabeth was at this crisis a proof of the fact that qualities which add lustre to a woman in ordinary life may be fatal in a Queen. A Princess who did not devote her whole night to prayer would have been a valuable ally for Charles IX., who found no help either in his wife or in his mistress.

As to the Queen-mother, she was absorbed in watching the King; he during supper had made a display of high spirits, which she interpreted as assumed to cloak some plan against herself. Such sudden cheerfulness was in too strong a contrast to the fractious humor he had betrayed by his persistency in hunting, and by a frenzy of toil at his forge, where he wrought iron, for Catherine to be duped by it. Though she could not guess what statesman was lending himself to these schemes and plots—for Charles IX. could put his mother's spies off the scent—Catherine had no doubt that some plan against her was in the wind.

The unexpected appearance of Tavannes, arriving at the same time as Strozzi, whom she had summoned, had greatly aroused her suspicions. By her power of organization Catherine was superior to the evolution of circumstances; but against sudden violence she was powerless.

As many persons know nothing of the state of affairs, complicated by the multiplicity of parties which then racked France, each leader having his own interests in view, it is needful to devote a few words to describing the dangerous crisis in which the Queen-mother had become entangled. And, as this will show Catherine de' Medici in a new light, it will carry us to the very core of this narrative.

Two words will fully summarize this strange woman, so interesting to study, whose influence left such deep traces on France. These two words are dominion and astrology. Catherine de' Medici was excessively ambitious; she had no passion but for power. Superstitious and fatalist, as many a man of superior mind has been, her only sincere belief was in the occult sciences. Without this twofold light, she must always remain misunderstood; and by giving the first place to her faith in astrology, a light will be thrown on the two philosophical figures of this study.

There was a man whom Catherine clung to more than to her children; this man was Cosmo Ruggieri. She gave him rooms in her Hôtel de Soissons; she had made him her chief counselor, instructing him to tell her if the stars ratified the advice and commonsense of her ordinary advisers.

Certain curious antecedent facts justified the power which Ruggieri exerted over his mistress till her latest breath. One of the most learned men of the sixteenth century was, beyond all doubt, the physician to Catherine's father, Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino. This leech was known as Ruggiero the elder (*vecchio Ruggier*, and in French *Roger l'Ancien*, with authors who have written concerning alchemy), to distinguish him from his two sons, Lorenzo Ruggiero, called the Great by writers on the Cabala, and Cosmo Ruggiero, Catherine's astrologer, also known as *Roger* by various French historians. French custom altered their name to Ruggieri, as it did Catherine's from Medici to Medicis.

The elder Ruggieri, then, was so highly esteemed by the family of the Medici that the two Dukes, Cosmo and Lorenzo, were godfathers to his sons. In his capacity of mathematician, astrologer, and physician to the Ducal House—three offices that were often scarcely distinguished—he cast the horoscope of Catherine's nativity, in concert with Bazile, the famous mathematician. At that period the occult sciences were cultivated with an eagerness which may seem surprising to the

skeptical spirits of this supremely analytical age, who perhaps may find in this historical sketch the germ of the positive sciences which flourish in the nineteenth century—bereft, however, of the poetic grandeur brought to them by the daring speculators of the sixteenth; for they, instead of applying themselves to industry, exalted art and vivified thought. The protection universally granted to these sciences by the sovereigns of the period was indeed justified by the admirable works of inventors who, starting from the search for the *great work*,* arrived at astonishing results.

Never, in fact, were rulers more curious for these mysteries. The Fugger family, in whom every modern Lucullus must recognize his chiefs and every banker his masters, were beyond a doubt men of business, not to be caught nodding; well, these practical men, while lending the capitalized wealth of Europe to the sovereigns of the sixteenth century—who ran into debt quite as handsomely as those of to-day—these illustrious entertainers of Charles V. furnished funds for the retorts of Paracelsus. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Ruggieri the elder was the head of that secret college whence came Cardan, Nostradamus, and Agrippa, each in turn physician to the Valois; and all the astronomers, astrologers, and alchemists who at that period crowded to the Courts of the princes of Christendom, and who found especial welcome and protection in France from Catherine de' Medici.

In the horoscope cast for Catherine by Bazile and Ruggieri the elder, the principal events of her life were predicted with an accuracy that is enough to drive disbelievers to despair. This forecast announced the disasters which, during the siege of Florence, affected her early life, her marriage with a Prince of France, his unexpected accession to the throne, the birth and the number of her children. Three of her sons were to reign in succession, her two daughters were to become queens; all were to die childless. And this was all so exactly

* Magnum opus.

verified that many historians have regarded it as a prophecy after the event.

It is well known that Nostradamus brought to the Castle of Chaumont, whither Catherine went at the time of la Renaudie's conspiracy, a woman who had the gift of reading the future. Now in the time of Francis II., when the Queen's sons were still children and in good health, before Elizabeth de Valois had married Philip II. of Spain, or Marguerite de Valois had married Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre, Nostradamus and this soothsayer confirmed all the details of the famous horoscope.

This woman, gifted no doubt with second-sight, and one of the extensive association of indefatigable inquirers for the *magnum opus*, though her life has evaded the ken of history, foretold that the last of these children to wear the crown would perish assassinated. Having placed the Queen in front of a magical mirror in which a spinning-wheel was reflected, each child's face appearing at the end of a spoke, the soothsayer made the wheel turn, and the Queen counted the number of turns. Each turn was a year of a reign. When Henri IV. was placed on the wheel, it went round twenty-two times. The woman—some say it was a man—told the terrified Queen that Henri de Bourbon would certainly be King of France, and reign so many years. Queen Catherine vowed a mortal hatred of the Béarnais on hearing that he would succeed the last, murdered Valois.

Curious to know what sort of death she herself would die, she was warned to beware of Saint-Germain. Thenceforth, thinking that she would be imprisoned or violently killed at the Castle of Saint-Germain, she never set foot in it, though, by its nearness to Paris, it was infinitely better situated for her plans than those where she took refuge with the King in troubled times. When she fell ill, a few days after the Duc de Guise was assassinated, during the assembly of the States-General at Blois, she asked the name of the prelate who came

to minister to her. She was told that his name was Saint-Germain.

"I am a dead woman!" she cried.

She died the next day, having lived just the number of years allotted to her by every reading of her horoscope.

This scene, known to the Cardinal de Lorraine, who ascribed it to the Black Art, was being realized; Francis II. had reigned for two turns only of the wheel, and Charles IX. was achieving his last. When Catherine spoke these strange words to her son Henri as he set out for Poland, "You will soon return!" they must be ascribed to her faith in the occult sciences, and not to any intention of poisoning Charles IX. Marguerite de France was now Queen of Navarre; Elizabeth was Queen of Spain; the Duc d'Anjou was King of Poland.

Many other circumstances contributed to confirm Catherine's belief in the occult sciences. On the eve of the tournament where Henri II. was mortally wounded, Catherine saw the fatal thrust in a dream. Her astrological council, consisting of Nostradamus and the two Ruggieri, had foretold the King's death. History has recorded Catherine's earnest entreaties that he should not enter the lists. The prognostic and the dream begotten of the prognostic were verified.

The chronicles of the time relate another and not less strange fact. The courier who brought news of the victory of Moncontour arrived at night, having ridden so hard that he had killed three horses. The Queen-mother was roused, and said, "I knew it."

"In fact," says Brantôme, "she had the day before announced her son's success and some details of the fight."

The astrologer attached to the House of Bourbon foretold that the youngest of the Princes in direct descent from Saint-Louis, the son of Antoine de Bourbon, would be King of France. This prophecy, noted by Sully, was fulfilled precisely as described by the horoscope, which made Henry IV.

remark that by dint of lies these astrologers hit on the very truth.

Be this as it may, most of the clever men of the time believed in the far-reaching "science of the Magi," as it was called by the masters of astrology—or sorcery, as it was termed by the people—and they were justified by the verification of horoscopes.

It was for Cosmo Ruggieri, her mathematician and astrologer—her wizard, if you will—that Catherine erected the pillar against the corn-market in Paris, the only remaining relic of the Hôtel de Soissons. Cosmo Ruggieri, like confessors, had a mysterious influence which satisfied him, as it does them. His secret ambition, too, was superior to that of vulgar minds. This man, depicted by romance-writers and playwrights as a mere juggler, held the rich abbey of Saint-Mahé in Lower Brittany, and had refused high ecclesiastical preferment; the money he derived in abundance from the superstitious mania of the time was sufficient for his private undertakings; and the Queen's hand, extended to protect his head, preserved every hair of it from harm.

As to Catherine's devouring thirst for dominion, her desire to acquire power was so great that, in order to grasp it, she could ally herself with the Guises, the enemies of the throne; and to keep the reins of State in her own hands, she adopted every means, sacrificing her friends, and even her children. This woman could not live without the intrigues of rule, as a gambler cannot live without the excitement of play. Though she was an Italian and a daughter of the luxurious Medici, the Calvinists, though they calumniated her plentifully, never accused her of having a lover.

Appreciating the maxim, "Divide to reign," for twelve years she had been constantly playing off one force against another. As soon as she took the reins of government into her hands, she was compelled to encourage discord to neutralize the strength of two rival Houses and save the throne.

This necessary system justified Henri II.'s foresight. Catherine was the inventor of the political see-saw, imitated since by every prince who has found himself in a similar position; she upheld, by turns, the Calvinists against the Guises, and the Guises against the Calvinists. Then, after using the two creeds to check each other in the heart of the people, she set the Duc d'Anjou against Charles IX. After using things to counteract each other, she did the same with men, always keeping the clue to their interests in her own hands.

But in this tremendous game, which requires the head of a Louis XI. or a Louis XVIII., the player inevitably is the object of hatred to all parties, and is condemned to win unfailingly, for one lost battle makes every interest his enemy, until indeed by dint of winning he ends by finding no one to play against him. The greater part of Charles IX.'s reign was the triumph of the domestic policy carried out by this wonderful woman. What extraordinary skill Catherine must have brought into play to get the chief command of the army given to the Duc d'Anjou, under a brave young King thirsting for glory, capable and generous—and in the face of the Connétable Anne de Montmorency! The Duc d'Anjou, in the eyes of all Europe, reaped the honors of Saint-Bartholomew's Day, while Charles IX. had all the odium. After instilling into the King's mind a spurious and covert jealousy of his brother, she worked upon this feeling so as to exhaust Charles IX.'s really fine qualities in the intrigues of rivalry with his brother. Cypierre, their first tutor, and Amyot, Charles IX.'s preceptor, had made their royal charge so noble a man, and had laid the foundations of so great a reign, that the mother hated the son from the very first day when she feared to lose her power after having conquered it with so much difficulty.

These facts have led certain historians to believe that the Queen-mother had a preference for Henri III.; but her behavior at this juncture proves that her heart was absolutely indifferent toward her children. The Duc d'Anjou, when he

went to govern Poland, robbed her of the tool she needed to keep Charles IX.'s mind fully occupied by these domestic intrigues, which had hitherto neutralized his energy by giving food to his vehement feelings. Catherine then hatched the conspiracy of la Mole and Coconnas, in which the Duc d'Alençon had a hand; and he, when he became Duc d'Anjou on his brother's being made King, lent himself very readily to his mother's views and displayed an ambition which was encouraged by his sister Marguerite, Queen of Navarre.

This plot, now ripened to the point which Catherine desired, aimed at putting the young Duke and his brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, at the head of the Calvinists, at seizing Charles IX., thus making the King, who had no heir, a prisoner, and leaving the throne free for the Duke, who proposed to establish Calvinism in France. Only a few days before his death, Calvin had won the reward he hoped for—the Reformed creed was called Calvinism in his honor.

La Mole and Coconnas had been arrested fifty days before the night on which this scene opens, to be beheaded in the following April; and if le Laboureur and other judicious writers had not amply proved that they were the victims of the Queen-mother, Cosmo Ruggieri's participation in the affair would be enough to show that she secretly directed it. This man, suspected and hated by the King for reasons which will be presently sufficiently explained, was implicated by the inquiries. He admitted that he had furnished la Mole with an image representing the King and stabbed to the heart with two needles. This form of witchcraft was at that time a capital crime. This kind of bedevilment (called in French *envoûter*, from the Latin *vultus*, it is said) represented one of the most infernal conceptions that hatred could imagine, and the word admirably expresses the magnetic and terrible process carried on, in occult science, by constantly active malevolence on the person devoted to death; its effects being incessantly suggested by the sight of the wax figure. The law at that

time considered, and with good reason, that the idea thus embodied constituted high treason. Charles IX. desired the death of the Florentine; Catherine, more powerful, obtained from the Supreme Court, through the intervention of her Councilor Lecamus, that her astrologer should be condemned only to the galleys. As soon as the King was dead, Ruggieri was pardoned by an edict of Henri III.'s,* who reinstated him in his revenues and received him at Court.

Catherine had, by this time, struck so many blows on her son's heart, that at this moment he was only anxious to shake off the yoke she had laid on him. Since Marie Touchet's absence, Charles IX., having nothing to occupy him, had taken to observing very keenly all that went on around him. He had set very skillful snares for certain persons whom he had trusted, to test their fidelity. He had watched his mother's proceedings, and had kept her in ignorance of his own, making use of all the faults she had inculcated in order to deceive her. Eager to efface the feeling of horror produced in France by the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, he took an active interest in public affairs, presided at the council, and tried by well-planned measures to seize the reins of government. Though the Queen might have attempted to counteract her son's endeavors by using all the influence that maternal authority and her habit of dominion could have over his mind, the downward course of distrust is so rapid that, at the first leap, the son had gone too far to be recalled.

On the day when his mother's words to the King of Poland were repeated to Charles IX., he already felt so ill that the most hideous notions dawned on his mind; and when such suspicions take possession of a son and a king nothing can remove them. In fact, on his death-bed his mother was obliged to interrupt him, exclaiming, "Do not say that, monsieur!" when Charles IX., intrusting his wife and

* In 1573 chosen and crowned King of Poland.

daughter to the care of Henri IV., was about to put him on his guard against Catherine.

Though Charles IX. never failed in the superficial respect of which she was so jealous, and she never called the kings, her sons, anything but monsieur, the Queen-mother had, for some months past, detected in Charles' manner the ill-disguised irony of revenge held in suspense. But he must be a clever man who could deceive Catherine. She held in her hand this conspiracy of the Duc d'Alençon and la Mole, so as to be able to divert Charles' effort at emancipation by this new rivalry of a brother; but before making use of it, she was anxious to dissipate the want of confidence which might make her reconciliation with the King impossible—for how could he leave the power in the hands of a mother who was capable of poisoning him?

Indeed, at this juncture she thought herself so far in danger that she had sent for Strozzi, her cousin, a soldier famous for his death. She held secret councils with Birague and the Gondis, and never had she so frequently consulted the oracle of the Hôtel de Soissons.

Though long habits of dissimulation and advancing years had given Catherine that abbess-like countenance, haughty and ascetic, expressionless and yet deep, reserved but scrutinizing, and so remarkable for any student of her portraits, those about her perceived a cloud over this cold, Florentine mirror. No sovereign was ever a more imposing figure than this woman had made herself since the day when she had succeeded in coercing the Guises after the death of Francis II. Her black velvet hood, with a peak over the forehead, for she never went out of mourning for Henri II., was, as it were, a womanly cowl round her cold, imperious features, to which she could, however, on occasion, give insinuating Italian charms. She was so well-made that she introduced the fashion for women to ride on horseback in such a way as to display their legs; this is enough to prove that hers were of

perfect form. Every lady in Europe thenceforth rode on a side-saddle, *à la planchette*,* for France had long set the fashions.

To any one who can picture this impressive figure, the scene in the great room that evening has an imposing aspect. The two Queens, so unlike in spirit, in beauty, and in dress, and almost at daggers drawn, were both much too absent-minded to give the impetus for which the courtiers waited to raise their spirits.

The dead secret of the drama which, for the past six months, the son and mother had been cautiously playing, was guessed by some of their followers; the Italians, more especially, had kept an attentive lookout, for if Catherine should lose the game, they would all be the victims. Under these circumstances, at a moment when Catherine and her son were vying with each other in subterfuges, the King was the centre of observation.

Charles IX., tired by a long day's hunting and by the serious reflections he brooded over in secret, looked forty this evening. He had reached the last stage of the malady which killed him, and which gave rise to grave suspicions of poison. According to de Thou, the Tacitus of the Valois, the surgeon found unaccountable spots in the King's body (*ex causâ incognitâ reperti livores*). His funeral was even more carelessly conducted than that of Francis II. Charles the Ninth was escorted from Saint-Lazare to Saint-Denis by Brantôme and a few archers of the Guard commanded by the Comte de Solern. This circumstance, added to the mother's supposed hatred of her son, may confirm the accusations brought against her by de Thou; at least it gives weight to the opinion here expressed, that she cared little for any of her children, an indifference which is accounted for by her faith in the pronouncement of astrology. Such a woman could not care for the tools that were to break in her hands. Henri III. was the

* Lit.: On a shelf.

last King under whom she could hope to reign; and that was all.

In our day it seems allowable to suppose that Charles IX. died a natural death. His excesses, his manner of life, the sudden development of his powers, his last struggles to seize the reins of government, his desire to live, his waste of strength, his last sufferings and his last pleasures, all indicate, to impartial judges, that he died of disease of the lungs, a malady at that time little understood and of which nothing was known; and its symptoms might lead Charles himself to believe that he was poisoned.

The real poison given him by his mother lay in the evil counsels of the courtiers with whom she surrounded him, who induced him to waste his intellectual and physical powers, and who thus were the cause of a disease which was purely incidental and not congenital.

Charles the Ninth, at this period of his life more than at any other, bore the stamp of a sombre dignity not unbecoming in a King. The majesty of his secret thoughts was reflected in his face, which was remarkable for the Italian complexion he inherited from his mother. This ivory pallor, so beautiful by artificial light, and so well suited with an expression of melancholy, gave added effect to his deep blue eyes showing narrowly under thick eyelids, and thus acquiring that keen acumen which imagination pictures in the glance of a King, while their color was an aid to dissimulation. Charles' eyes derived an awe-inspiring look from his high, marked eyebrows —accentuating a lofty forehead—which he could lift or lower with singular facility. His nose was long and broad and thick at the tip—a true lion's nose; he had large ears; light reddish hair; lips of the color of blood, the lips of a consumptive man; the upper lip thin and satirical, the lower full enough to indicate fine qualities of feeling.

The wrinkles stamped on his brow in early life, when terrible anxieties had blighted its freshness, made his face in-

tensely interesting; more than one had been caused by remorse for the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, a deed which had been craftily foisted on him; but there were two other lines on his face which would have been eloquent to any student who at that time could have had a special revelation of the principles of modern physiology. These lines made a deep furrow from the cheek-bones to each corner of the mouth, and betrayed the efforts made by an exhausted organization to respond to mental strain and to violent physical enjoyment. Charles IX. was worn out. The Queen-mother, seeing her work, must have felt some remorse, unless, indeed, politics stifle such a feeling in all who sit under the purple. If Catherine could have foreseen the effects of her intrigues on her son, she might perhaps have shrunk from them(?).

It was a terrible spectacle. The King, by nature so strong, had become weak; the spirit, so nobly tempered, was racked by doubts; this man, the centre of authority, felt himself helpless; the naturally firm temper had lost confidence in its power. The warrior's valor had degenerated into ferocity, reserve had become dissimulation, the refined and tender passion of the Valois was an insatiable thirst for pleasure. This great man, misprized, perverted, with every side of his noble spirit chafed to a sore, a King without power, a loving heart without a friend, torn a thousand ways by conflicting schemes, was, at four-and-twenty, the melancholy image of a man who has found everything wanting, who distrusts every one, who is ready to stake his all, even his life. Only lately had he understood his mission, his power, his resources, and the obstacles placed by his mother in the way of the pacification of the kingdom; but the light glowed in a broken lamp.

Two men, for whom the King had so great a regard that he had saved one from the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, and had dined with the other at a time when his enemies accused him of poisoning the King—his chief physician Jean Chapelain, and the great surgeon Ambroise Paré—had been

sent for from the country by Catherine, and, obeying the summons in hot haste, arrived at the King's bedtime. They looked anxiously at their sovereign, and some of the courtiers made whispered inquiries, but they answered with due reserve, saying nothing of the sentence each had secretly pronounced. Now and again the King would raise his heavy eyelids and try to conceal from the bystanders the glance he shot at his mother. Suddenly he rose, and went to stand in front of the fireplace.

"Monsieur de Chiverni," said he, "why do you keep the title of Chancellor of Anjou and Poland? Are you our servant or our brother's?"

"I am wholly yours, Sire," replied Chiverni, with a bow.

"Well, then, come to-morrow; I mean to send you to Spain, for strange things are doing at the Court of Madrid, gentlemen."

The King looked at his wife and returned to his chair.

"Strange things are doing everywhere," he added in a whisper to Marshal Tavannes, one of the favorites of his younger days. And he rose to lead the partner of his youthful pleasures into the recess of an oriel window, saying to him—

"I want you; stay till the last. I must know whether you will be with me or against me. Do not look astonished. I am breaking the leading strings. My mother is at the bottom of all the mischief here. In three months I shall either be dead or be really King. As you love your life, silence! You are in my secret with Solern and Villeroy. If the least hint is given, it will come from one of you three. Do not keep too close to me; go and pay your court to my mother; tell her that I am dying, and that you cannot regret it, for that I am but a poor creature."

Charles IX. walked round the room leaning on his old favorite's shoulder, and discussing his sufferings with him, to mislead inquisitive persons; then, fearing that his coldness

might be too marked, he went to talk with the two Queens, calling Birague to his side.

Just then Pinard glided in at the door and came up to Queen Catherine, slipping in like an eel, close to the wall. He murmured two words in the Queen-mother's ear, and she replied with an affirmative nod. The King did not ask what this meant, but he went back to his chair with a scowl round the room of horrible rage and jealousy. This little incident was of immense importance in the eyes of all the Court. This exertion of authority without any appeal to the King was like the drop of water that makes the glass overflow. The young Queen and Countess Fieschi withdrew without the King's paying her the least attention, but the Queen-mother attended her daughter-in-law to the door. Though the misunderstanding between the mother and son lent enormous interest to the movements, looks, and attitude of Catherine and Charles IX., their cold composure plainly showed the courtiers that they were in the way; as soon as the Queen had gone they took their leave. At ten o'clock no one remained but certain intimate persons—the two Gondis, Tavannes, the Comte de Solern, Birague, and the Queen-mother.

The King sat plunged in the deepest melancholy. This silence was fatiguing. Catherine seemed at a loss; she wished to retire, and she wanted the King to attend her to the door, but Charles remained obstinately lost in thought; she rose to bid him good-night, Charles was obliged to follow her example; she took his arm, and went a few steps with him to speak in his ear these few words—

"Monsieur, I have matters of importance to discuss with you."

As she left, the Queen-mother met the eyes of the Gondis reflected in a glass, and gave them a significant glance, which her son could not see—all the more so because he himself was exchanging meaning looks with the Comte de Solern and Villeroy; Tavannes was absorbed in thought.

"Sire," said the Maréchal de Retz, coming out of his meditations, "you seem right royally bored. Do you never amuse yourself nowadays? Heaven above us! where are the times when we went gadding about the streets of nights?"

"Yes, those were good times," said the King, not without a sigh.

"Why not be off now?" said Monsieur de Birague, bowing himself out, with a wink at the Gondis.

"I always think of that time with pleasure," cried the Maréchal de Retz.

"I should like to see you on the roofs, Monsieur le Maréchal," said Tavannes. "*Sacré chat d'Italie* (Sacred Italian cat), if you might but break your neck," he added in an undertone to the King.

"I know not whether you or I should be nimblest at jumping across a yard or a street; but what I do know is, that neither of us is more afraid of death than the other," replied the Duc de Retz.

"Well, Sire, will you come to scour the town as you did when you were young?" said the master of the wardrobe to the King.

Thus at four-and-twenty the unhappy King was no longer thought young, even by his flatterers. Tavannes and the King recalled, like two schoolfellows, some of the good tricks they had perpetrated in Paris, and the party was soon made up. The two Italians, being dared to jump from roof to roof across the street, pledged themselves to follow where the King should lead. They all went to put on common clothes.

The Comte de Solern, left alone with the King, looked at him with amazement. The worthy German, though filled with compassion as he understood the position of the King of France, was fidelity and honor itself, but he had not a lively imagination. King Charles, surrounded by enemies, and trusting no one, not even his wife—who, not knowing that his mother and all her servants were inimical to him, had

committed some little indiscretions—was happy to have found in Monsieur de Solern a devotion which justified complete confidence. Tavannes and Villeroy were only partly in the secret. The Comte de Solern alone knew the whole of the King's schemes; and he was in every way very useful to his master, inasmuch that he had a handful of confidential and attached men at his orders who obeyed him blindly. Monsieur de Solern, who held a command in the Archers of the Guard, had for some days been picking from among his men some who were faithful in their adherence to the King, to form a chosen company. The King could think of everything.

"Well, Solern," said Charles IX., "we are needing a pretext for spending a night out of doors. I had the excuse, of course, of Madame de Belleville; but this is better, for my mother can find out what goes on at Marie's house."

Monsieur de Solern, as he was to attend the King, asked if he might not go the rounds with some of his Germans, and to this Charles consented. By eleven o'clock the King, in better spirits now, set out with his three companions to explore the neighborhood of the Rue Saint-Honoré.

"I will take my lady by surprise," said Charles to Tavannes as they went along the Rue de l'Autruche.

To make this nocturnal play more intelligible to those who may be ignorant of the topography of old Paris, it will be necessary to explain the position of the Rue de l'Autruche. The part of the Louvre, begun by Henri II., was still being built amid the wreck of houses. Where the wing now stands looking over the Pont des Arts, there was at that time a garden. In the place of the Colonnade there were a moat and a drawbridge on which, somewhat later, a Florentine, the Maréchal d'Ancre, met his death. Beyond this garden rose the turrets of the Hôtel de Bourbon, the residence of the princes of that branch till the day when the constable's treason (after he was ruined by the confiscation of his posses-

sions, decreed by Francis I., to avoid having to decide between him and his mother) put an end to the trial that had cost France so dear, by the confiscation of the constable's estates.

This castle, which looked well from the river, was not destroyed till the time of Louis XIV.

The Rue de l'Autruche ran from the Rue Saint-Honoré, ending at the Hôtel de Bourbon on the quay. This street, named de l'Autriche on some old plans, and de l'Austruc on others, has, like many more, disappeared from the map. The Rue des Poulies would seem to have been cut across the ground occupied by the houses nearest to the Rue Saint-Honoré. Authors have differed, too, as to the etymology of the name. Some suppose it to be derived from a certain Hôtel d'Osteriche (*Osterrichen*), inhabited in the fourteenth century by a daughter of that house who married a French nobleman. Some assert that this was the site of the royal aviaries, whither, once on a time, all Paris crowded to see a living ostrich.

Be it as it may, this tortuous street was made notable by the residences of certain Princes of the Blood, who dwelt in the vicinity of the Louvre. Since the sovereign had deserted the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, where for several centuries he had lived in the Bastille, and removed to the Louvre, many of the nobility had settled near the palace. The Hôtel de Bourbon had its fellow in the old Hôtel d'Alençon in the Rue Saint-Honoré. This, the palace of the Counts of that name, always an appanage of the Crown, was at this time owned by Henry II.'s fourth son, who subsequently took the title of Duc d'Anjou, and who died in the reign of Henri III., to whom he gave no little trouble. The estate then reverted to the Crown, including the old palace, which was pulled down. In those days a prince's residence was a vast assemblage of buildings; to form some idea of its extent, we have only to go and see the space covered by the Hôtel de Soubise, which

is still standing in the Marais. Such a palace included all the buildings necessary to these magnificent lives, which may seem almost problematical to many persons who see how poor is the state of a prince in these days. There were immense stables, lodgings for physicians, librarians, chancellor, chaplains, treasurers, officials, pages, paid servants, and lackeys, attached to the prince's person.

Not far from the Rue Saint-Honoré, in a garden belonging to the Hôtel, stood a pretty little house built in 1520 by command of the celebrated Duchesse d'Alençon, which had since been surrounded with other houses erected by merchants. Here the King had installed Marie Touchet. Although the Duc d'Alençon was engaged in a conspiracy against the King at that time, he was incapable of annoying him in such a matter.

As the King was obliged to pass by his lady's door on his way down the Rue Saint-Honoré, where at that time highway robbers had no opportunities within the Barrière des Sergents, he could hardly avoid stopping there. While keeping a lookout for some stroke of luck—a belated citizen to be robbed or the watch to be thrashed—the King scanned every window, peeping in wherever he saw lights, to see what was going on, or to overhear a conversation. But he found his good city in a provokingly peaceful state. On a sudden, as he came in front of the house kept by a famous perfumer named René, who supplied the Court, the King was seized with one of those swift inspirations which are suggested by antecedent observations, as he saw a bright light shining from the topmost window of the roof.

This perfumer was strongly suspected of doctoring rich uncles when they complained of illness; he was credited at Court with the invention of the famous *Élixir à successions*—the Elixir of Inheritance—and had been accused of poisoning Jeanne d'Albret, Henri IV.'s mother, who was buried without her head having been opened, in spite of the express

orders of Charles IX., as a contemporary* tells us. For two months past the King had been seeking some stratagem to enable him to spy out the secrets of René's laboratory, whither Como Ruggieri frequently resorted. Charles intended, if anything should arouse his suspicions, to take steps himself without the intervention of the police or the law, over whom his mother would exert the influence of fear or of bribery.

It is beyond all doubt that during the sixteenth century, and the years immediately preceding and following it, poisoning had been brought to a pitch of perfection which remains unknown to modern chemistry, but which is indisputably proved by history. Italy, the cradle of modern science, was at that time the inventor and mistress of these secrets, many of which are lost. Romancers have made such extravagant use of this fact, that whenever they introduce Italians they make them play the part of assassins and poisoners.

But though Italy had then the monopoly of those subtle poisons of which historians tell us, we must regard her supremacy in toxicology merely as part of her preëminence in all branches of knowledge and in the arts, in which she led the way for all Europe. The crimes of the period were not hers alone; she served the passions of the age, as she built magnificently, commanded armies, painted glorious frescoes, sang songs, loved Queens, and directed politics. At Florence this hideous art had reached such perfection that a woman dividing a peach with a duke could make use of a knife of which one side only was poisoned, and, eating the untainted half, dealt death with the other. A pair of perfumed gloves introduced a mortal malady by the pores of the hand; poison could be concealed in a bunch of fresh roses of which the fragrance, inhaled but once, meant certain death. Don Juan of Austria, it is said, was poisoned by a pair of boots.

So King Charles had a right to be inquisitive, and it is easy

* De Thou: "Historia sui Temporis."

to imagine how greatly the dark suspicions which tormented him added to his eagerness to detect René in the act.

The old fountain, since rebuilt, at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, afforded this illustrious crew the necessary access to the roof of a house, which the King pretended that he wished to invade, not far from René's. Charles, followed by his companions, began walking along the roofs, to the great terror of the good folk awakened by these marauders, who would call to them, giving them some coarsely grotesque name, listen to family squabbles or love-makings, or do some vexatious damage.

When the two Gondis saw Tavannes and the King clambering along the roof adjoining René's, the Maréchal de Retz sat down, saying he was tired, and his brother remained with him.

"So much the better," thought the King, glad to be quit of his spies.

Tavannes made fun of the two Italians, who were then left alone in the midst of perfect silence in a place where they had only the sky above them and the cats for listeners. And the brothers took advantage of this position to speak out thoughts which they never would have uttered elsewhere—thoughts suggested by the incidents of the evening.

"Albert," said the Grand Master to the marshal, "the King will get the upper hand of the Queen; we are doing bad business so far as our fortunes are concerned by attaching ourselves to Catherine's. If we transfer our services to the King now, when he is seeking some support against his mother, and needs capable men to rely upon, we shall not be turned out like wild beasts when the Queen-mother is banished, imprisoned, or killed."

"You will not get far, Charles, by that road," the marshal replied. "You will follow your master into the grave, and he has not long to live; he is wrecked by dissipation; Cosmo Ruggieri has foretold his death next year."

"A dying boar has often gored the hunter," said Charles de Gondi. "This plot of the Duc d'Alençon with the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé, of which la Mole and Coconnas are taking the *onus*, is dangerous rather than useful. In the first place, the King of Navarre, whom the Queen-mother hopes to take in the fact, is too suspicious of her, and will have nothing to do with it. He means to get the benefit of the conspiracy and run none of the risks. And now, the last idea is to place the crown on the head of the Duc d'Alençon, who is to turn Calvinist."

"Foolery! Dolt that you are, do you not see that this plot enables our Queen to learn what the Huguenots can do with the Duc d'Alençon, and what the King means to do with the Huguenots? For the King is temporizing with them. And Catherine, to set the King riding on a wooden horse, will betray the plot which must nullify his schemes."

"Ay!" said Charles de Gondi, "by dint of taking our advice she can beat us at our own game. That is very good."

"Good for the Duc d'Anjou, who would rather be King of France than King of Poland; I am going to explain matters to him."

"You are going, Albert?"

"To-morrow. Is it not my duty to attend the King of Poland? I shall join him at Venice, where the ladies have undertaken to amuse him."

"You are prudence itself."

"*Che bestia!* I assure you solemnly that there is not the slightest danger for either of us at Court. If there were, should I leave? I would stick to our kind mistress."

"Kind!" said the Grand Master. "She is the woman to drop her tools if she finds them too heavy."

"*O coglione!* You call yourself a soldier, and are afraid of death? Every trade has its duties, and our duty is to

Fortune. When we attach ourselves to monarchs who are the fount of all temporal power, and who protect and ennoble and enrich our families, we have to give them such love as inflames the soul of the martyr for heaven; when they sacrifice us for the throne we may perish, for we die as much for ourselves as for them, but our family does not perish. *Ecco;* I have said!"

"You are quite right, Albert; you have got the old duchy of Retz."

"Listen to me," said the Duc de Retz. "The Queen has great hopes of the Ruggieri and their arts to reconcile her to her son. When that artful youth refused to have anything to do with René, our Queen easily guessed what her son's suspicions were. But who can tell what the King has in his pocket? Perhaps he is only doubting as to what fate he intends for his mother; he hates her, you understand? He said something of his purpose to the Queen, and the Queen talked of it to Madame de Fieschi; Madame de Fieschi carried it on to the Queen-mother, and since then the King has kept out of his wife's way."

"It was high time——" said Charles de Gondi.

"What to do?" asked the marshal.

"To give the King something to do," replied the Grand Master, who, though he was on less intimate terms with Catherine than his brother, was not less clear-sighted.

"Charles," said de Retz gravely, "I have started on a splendid road; but if you want to be a Duke, you must, like me, be our mistress' ready tool. She will remain Queen; she is the strongest. Madame de Sauves is still devoted to her; and the King of Navarre and the Duc d'Alençon are devoted to Madame de Sauves; Catherine will always have them in leading strings under this King, as she will have them under King Henri III. Heaven send he may not be ungrateful!"

"Why?"

"His mother does too much for him."

"Hark! There is a noise in the Rue Saint-Honoré," cried Charles de Gondi. "René's door is being locked. Can you not hear a number of men? They must have taken the Ruggieri."

"The devil! What a piece of prudence! The King has not shown his usual impetuosity. But where will he imprison them? Let us see what is going on."

The brothers reached the corner of the Rue de l'Autruche at the moment when the King was entering his mistress' house. By the light of the torches held by the gatekeeper they recognized Tavannes and the Ruggieri.

"Well, Tavannes," the Grand Master called out as he ran after the King's companion, who was making his way back to the Louvre, "what adventures have you had?"

"We dropped on a full council of wizards, and arrested two who are friends of yours, and who will explain for the benefit of French noblemen by what means you, who are not Frenchmen, have contrived to clutch two Crown offices," said Tavannes, half in jest.

"And the King?" asked the Grand Master, who was not much disturbed by Tavannes' hostility.

"He is staying with his mistress."

"We have risen to where we stand by the most absolute devotion to our masters, a brilliant and noble career which you too have adopted, my dear Duke," replied the Maréchal de Retz.

The three courtiers walked on in silence. As they bade each other good-night, rejoining their retainers, who escorted them home, two men lightly glided along the Rue de l'Autruche in the shadow of the wall. These were the King and the Comte de Solern, who soon reached the river-bank at a spot where a boat and rowers, engaged by the German Count, were awaiting them. In a few minutes they had reached the opposite shore.

"My mother is not in bed," cried the King, "she will see us; we have not made a good choice of our meeting-place."

"She will think some duel is in the wind," said Solern. "And how is she to distinguish who we are at this distance?"

"Well! Even if she sees me!" cried Charles IX. "I have made up my mind now."

The King and his friend jumped on shore, and hurried off toward the Pré aux Clercs. On arriving there, the Comte de Solern, who went first, parleyed with a man on sentry, with whom he exchanged a few words, and who then withdrew to a group of others.

Presently two men, who seemed to be princes by the way the outposts saluted them, left the spot where they were in hiding behind some broken fencing, and came to the King, to whom they bent the knee; but Charles IX. raised them before they could touch the ground, saying—

"No ceremony; here we are all gentlemen together."

These three were now joined by a venerable old man, who might have been taken for the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, but that he had died the year before. Then all four walked on as quickly as possible to reach a spot where their conversation could not be overheard by their retainers, and Solern followed them at a little distance to keep guard over the King. This faithful servant felt some doubts which Charles did not share, for to him, indeed, life was too great a burden. The Count de Solern was the only witness present at the meeting on the King's side.

It soon became interesting.

"Sire," said one of the speakers, "the Connétable de Montmorency, the best friend the King, your father, had, and possessed of all his secrets, agreed with the Maréchal de Saint-André that Madame Catherine should be sewn up in a sack and thrown into the river. If that had been done, many good men would be alive now."

"I have executions enough on my conscience, monsieur," replied the King.

"Well, Sire," said the youngest of the four gentlemen, "from the depths of exile Queen Catherine would still manage to interfere and find men to help her. Have we not everything to fear from the Guises, who, nine years since, schemed for a monstrous Catholic alliance, in which your majesty is not included, and which is a danger to the throne? This alliance is a Spanish invention—for Spain still cherishes the hope of leveling the Pyrenees. Sire, Calvinism can save France by erecting a moral barrier between this nation and one that aims at the Empire of the world. If the Queen-mother finds herself in banishment, she will throw herself on Spain and the Guises."

"Gentlemen," said the King, "I will have you to know that, with your help, and with peace established on a basis of confidence, I will undertake to make every soul in the kingdom quake. By God and every sacred relic! it is time that the royal authority should assert itself. Understand this clearly; so far, my mother is right, power is slipping from your grasp, as it is from mine. Your estates, your privileges are bound to the throne; when you have allowed religion to be overthrown, the hands you are using as tools will turn against the Monarchy and against you.

"I have had enough of fighting ideas with weapons that cannot touch them. Let us see whether Protestantism can make its way if left to itself; above all, let us see what the spirit of that faction means to attack. The admiral, God be merciful to him, was no enemy of mine. He swore to me that he would restrain the revolt within the limits of spiritual feeling, and in the temporal kingdom secure mastery to the King and submissive subjects. Now, gentlemen, if the thing is still in your power, set an example, and help your sovereign to control the malcontents who are disturbing the peace of both parties alike. War robs us of all our revenue, and ruins

the country; I am weary of this troubled State—so much so that, if it should be absolutely necessary, I would sacrifice my mother. I would do more: I would have about me a like number of Catholics and of Protestants, and I would hang Louis XI.'s axe over their heads to keep them equal. If Messieurs de Guise plot a Holy Alliance which endangers the Crown, the executioner shall begin on them.

"I understand the griefs of my people, and am quite ready to cut freely at the nobles who bring trouble on our country. I care little for questions of conscience; I mean henceforth to have submissive subjects who will work, under my rule, at the prosperity of the State.

"Gentlemen, I give you ten days to treat with your adherents, to break up your plots, and return to me, who will be a father to you. If you are refractory, you will see great changes. I shall make use of smaller men who, at my bidding, will rush upon the great lords. I will follow the example of a king who pacified his realm by striking down greater men than you are who dared to defy him. If Catholic troops are wanting, I can appeal to my brother of Spain to defend a threatened throne; nay, and if I need a Minister to carry out my will, he will lend me the Duke of Alva."

"In that event, Sire, we can find Germans to fight your Spaniards," said one of the party.

"I may remind you, cousin," said Charles IX. coldly, "that my wife's name is Elizabeth of Austria; your allies on that side might fail you. But take my advice; let us fight this alone without calling in the foreigner. You are the object of my mother's hatred, and you care enough for me to play the part of second in my duel with her—well, then, listen. You stand so high in my esteem that I offer you the office of high constable; you will not betray us as the other has done."

The Prince thus addressed took the King's hand in a friendly grasp, exclaiming—

"God's 'ounds, brother, that is indeed forgiving evil!

But, Sire, the head cannot move without the tail, and our tail is hard to drag along. Give us more than ten days. We still need at least a month to make the rest hear reason; by the end of that time we shall be the masters."

"A month, so be it; Villeroy is my only plenipotentiary. Take no word but his, whatever any one may say."

"One month," said the three other gentlemen; "that will be enough time."

"Gentlemen," said the King, "we are but five, all men of mettle. If there is any treachery, we shall know with whom to deal."

The three gentlemen left the King with every mark of deep respect and kissed his hand.

As the King recrossed the Seine, four o'clock was striking by the Louvre clock.

Queen Catherine was still up.

"My mother is not gone to bed," said Charles to the Comte de Solern.

"She too has her forge," said the German.

"My dear Count, what must you think of a king who is reduced to conspiracy?" said Charles IX. bitterly, after a pause.

"I think, Sire, that if you would only allow me to throw that woman into the river, as our young friend said, France would soon be at peace."

"Parricide!—and after Saint-Bartholomew's!" said the King. "No, no—Exile. Once fallen, my mother would not have an adherent or a partisan."

"Well, then, Sire," the Count went on, "allow me to take her into custody now, at once, and escort her beyond the frontier; for by to-morrow she will have won you round again to her views."

"Well," said the King, "come to my forge; no one can hear us there. Beside, I am anxious that my mother should know nothing of the arrest of the Ruggieri. If she knows I

am within, the good lady will suspect nothing, and we will concert the measures for arresting her."

When the King, attended by Solern, went into the low room which served as his workshop, he smiled as he pointed to his forge and various tools.

"I do not suppose," said he, "that of all the kings France may ever have, there will be another with a taste for such a craft. But when I am really King, I shall not forge swords; they shall all be sheathed."

"Sire," said the Comte de Solern, "the fatigues of tennis, your work at the forge, hunting, and—may I say it?—love-making, are chariots lent you by the devil to hasten your journey to Saint-Denis."

"Ah, Solern!" said the King sadly, "if only you could feel the fire they have set burning in my heart and body. Nothing can slake it. Are you sure of the men who are guarding the Ruggieri?"

"As sure as of myself."

"Well, in the course of this day I shall have made up my mind. Think out the means of acting, and I will give you my final instructions at five this evening, at Madame de Belleville's."

The first gleams of daybreak were struggling with the lights in the King's workshop, where the Comte de Solern had left him alone, when he heard the door open and saw his mother, looking like a ghost in the gloom. Though Charles IX. was highly strung and nervous, he did not start, although under the circumstances this apparition had an ominous and grotesque aspect.

"Monsieur," said she, "you are killing yourself——"

"I am fulfilling my horoscopes," he retorted, with a bitter smile. "But you, madame, are you as ill as I am?"

"We have both watched through the night, monsieur, but with very different purpose. When you were setting out to

confer with your bitterest enemies in the open night, and hiding it from your mother, with the connivance of Tavannes and the Gondis, with whom you pretended to be scouring the town, I was reading dispatches which prove that a terrible conspiracy is hatching, in which your brother the Duc d'Alençon is implicated with your brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, the Prince de Condé, and half the nobility of your kingdom. Their plan is no less than to snatch the Crown from you by taking possession of your person. These gentlemen have already a following of fifty thousand men, all good soldiers."

"Indeed!" said the King incredulously.

"Your brother is becoming a Huguenot," the Queen went on.

"My brother joining the Huguenots?" cried Charles, brandishing the iron bar he held.

"Yes. The Duc d'Alençon, a Huguenot at heart, is about to declare himself. Your sister, the Queen of Navarre, has scarcely a tinge of affection left for you. She loves Monsieur le Duc d'Alençon, she loves Bussy, and she also loves little la Mole."

"What a large heart!" said the King.

"Little la Mole, to grow great," the Queen went on, "can think of no better means than making a King of France to his mind. Then, it is said, he is to be high constable."

"That damned Margot!" cried the King. "This is what comes of her marrying a heretic——"

"That would be nothing; but then there is the head of the younger branch, whom you have placed near the throne against my warnings, and who only wants to see you all kill each other! The House of Bourbon is the enemy of the House of Valois. Mark this, monsieur, a younger branch must always be kept in abject poverty, for it is born with the spirit of conspiracy, and it is folly to give it weapons when it has none, or to leave them in its possession when it takes

them. The younger branches must be impotent for mischief —that is the law of sovereignty. The sultans of Asia observe it.

"The proofs are upstairs in my closet, whither I begged you to follow me when we parted last night, but you had other projects. Within a month, if we do not take a high hand, your fate will be that of Charles the Simple."

"Within a month!" exclaimed Charles, amazed at the coincidence of this period with the term fixed by the princes that very night. "In a month we shall be the masters," thought he to himself, repeating their words. "You have proofs, madame?" he asked aloud.

"They are unimpeachable, monsieur; they are supplied by my daughter Marguerite. Terrified by the probable outcome of such a coalition, in spite of her weakness for your brother d'Alençon, the throne of the Valois lay, for once, nearer to her heart than all her amours. She asks indeed, as the reward of her revelation, that la Mole shall go scot-free; but that popinjay seems to me to be a rogue we ought to get rid of, as well as the Comte de Coconnas, your brother d'Alençon's right-hand man. As to the Prince de Condé, that boy would agree to anything so long as I may be flung into the river; I do not know if that is his idea of a handsome return on his wedding-day for the pretty wife I got him.

"This is a serious matter, monsieur. You spoke of predictions! I know of one which says that the Bourbons will possess the throne of the Valois; and if we do not take care, it will be fulfilled. Do not be vexed with your sister, she has acted well in this matter.

"My son," she went on, after a pause, with an assumption of tenderness in her tone, "many evil-minded persons, in the interest of the Guises, want to sow dissension between you and me, though we are the only two persons in the realm whose interests are identical. Reflect. You blame yourself now, I know, for Saint-Bartholomew's night; you blame me

for persuading you to it. But Catholicism, monsieur, ought to be the bond of Spain, France, and Italy, three nations which by a secretly and skillfully worked scheme may, in the course of time, be united under the House of Valois. Do not forfeit your chances by letting the cord slip which includes these three kingdoms in the pale of the same faith.

"Why should not the Valois and the Medici carry out, to their great glory, the project of Charles V., who lost his head? Let those descendants, of Jane the Crazy, people the new world at which they are grasping. The Medici, masters of Florence and Rome, will subdue Italy to your rule; they will secure all its advantages by a treaty of commerce and alliance, and recognize you as their liege lord for the fiefs of Piedmont, the Milanese, and Naples, over which you have rights. These, monsieur, are the reasons for the war to the death we are waging with the Huguenots. Why do you compel us to repeat these things?

"Charlemagne made a mistake when he pushed northward. France is a body of which the heart is on the Gulf of Lyons, and whose two arms are Spain and Italy. Thus we should command the Mediterranean, which is like a basket into which all the wealth of the East is poured to the benefit of the Venetians now, in the teeth of Philip II.

"And if the friendship of the Medici and your inherited rights can thus entitle you to hope for Italy, force, or alliance, or perhaps inheritance, may give you Spain. There you must step in before the ambitious House of Austria, to whom the Guelphs would have sold Italy, and who still dream of possessing Spain. Though your wife is a daughter of that line, humble Austria, hug her closely to stifle her! There lie the enemies of your dominion, since from thence comes aid for the Reformers. Do not listen to men who would profit by our disagreement, and who fill your head with trouble by representing me as your chief enemy at home. Have I hindered you from having an heir? Is it my fault that your mistress

has a son and your wife only a daughter? Why have you not by this time three sons, who would cut off all this sedition at the root? Is it my part, monsieur, to reply to these questions? If you had a son, would Monsieur d'Alençon conspire against you?"

As she spoke these words, Catherine fixed her eyes on Charles IX. with the fascinating gaze of a bird of prey on its victim. The daughter of the Medici was beautiful in her way; her real feelings illumined her face, which, like that of a gambler at the green-table, was radiant with ambitious greed. Charles IX. saw her no longer as the mother of one man, but, as she had been called, the mother of armies and empires (*mater castrorum*). Catherine had spread the pinions of her genius, and was boldly soaring in the realm of high politics of the Medici and the Valois, sketching the vast plans which had frightened Henri II., and which, transmitted by the Medici to Richelieu,* were stored in the cabinet of the House of Bourbon. But Charles IX., seeing his mother take so many precautions, supposed them to be necessary, and wondered to what end she was taking them. He looked down; he hesitated; his distrust was not to be dispelled by words.

Catherine was astonished to see what deeply founded suspicion lurked in her son's heart.

"Well, monsieur," she went on, "do you not choose to understand me? What are we, you and I, compared with the eternity of a royal Crown? Do you suspect me of any purposes but those which must agitate us who dwell in the sphere whence empires are governed?"

"Madame," said he, "I will follow you to your closet—we must act——"

"Act?" cried Catherine. "Let them go their way and take them in the act; the law will rid you of them. For God's sake, monsieur, let them see us smiling."

* Reign Louis XIII., son of Henry IV. and Marie de' Medici.

The Queen withdrew. The King alone remained standing for a minute, for he had sunk into extreme dejection.

"On which side are the snares?" he said aloud. "Is it she who is deceiving me, or they? What is the better policy? *Deus! discerne causam meam,*" he cried, with tears in his eyes. "Life is a burden to me. Whether natural or compulsory, I would rather meet death than these contradictory torments," he added, and he struck the hammer on his anvil with such violence that the vaults of the Louvre quaked. "Great God!" he exclaimed, going out and looking up at the sky, "Thou for whose holy religion I am warring, give me the clearness of Thine eyes to see into my mother's heart by questioning the Ruggieri."

The little house inhabited by the Lady of Belleville, where Charles had left his prisoners, was the last but one in the Rue de l'Autruche, near the Rue Saint-Honoré. The street-gate, guarded by two little lodges built of brick, looked very plain at a time when gates and all their accessories were so elaborately treated. The entrance consisted of two stone pillars, diamond-cut, and the architrave was graced with the reclining figure of a woman holding a cornucopia. The gate, of timber covered with heavy iron scroll-work, had a wicket peephole at the level of the eye for spying any one who desired admittance. In each lodge a porter lived, and Charles' caprice insisted that a gatekeeper should be on the watch day and night.

There was a little courtyard in front of the house paved with Venetian mosaic. At that time, when carriages had not been invented, and ladies rode on horseback or in litters, the courtyard could be splendid with no fear of injury from horses or vehicles. We must constantly bear these facts in mind to understand the narrowness of the streets, the small extent of the forecourts, and various other details of the dwellings of the fifteenth century.

The house, of one story above the ground floor, had at the top a sculptured frieze, on which rested a roof sloping up from all the four sides to a flat space at the top. The sides were pierced by dormer windows adorned with architraves and side-posts, which some great artist had chiseled into delicate arabesques. All the three windows of the second-floor room were equally conspicuous for this embroidery in stone, thrown into relief by the red-brick walls. On the ground floor a double flight of outside steps, elegantly sculptured—the balcony being remarkable for a true lover's knot—led to the house-door, decorated in the Venetian style with stone cut into pointed lozenges, a form of ornament that was repeated on the window-jambs on each side of the door, a fashion then much in vogue.

A garden laid out in the fashion of the time, and full of rare flowers, occupied a space behind the house of equal extent with the forecourt. A vine hung over the walls. A silver pine stood in the centre of a grass-plot; the flower borders were divided from the turf by winding paths leading to a little bower of clipped yews at the further end. The garden walls, covered with a coarse mosaic of colored pebbles, pleased the eye by a richness of color that harmonized with the hues of the flowers. The garden-front of the house, like the front to the court, had a pretty balcony from the middle window over the door; and on both facades alike the architectural treatment of this middle window was carried up to the frieze of the cornice, with a bow that gave it the appearance of a lantern. The sills of the other windows were inlaid with fine marbles let into the stone.

Notwithstanding the perfect taste evident in this building, it had a look of gloom. It was shut out from the open day by neighboring houses and the roofs of the Hôtel d'Alençon, which cast their shadow over the courtyard and garden; then absolute silence prevailed. Still, this silence, this subdued light, this solitude, were restful to a soul that could give

itself up to a single thought, as in a cloister where we may meditate, or in a snug home where we may love.

Who can fail now to conceive of the interior elegance of this dwelling, the only spot in all his kingdom where the last Valois but one could pour out his heart, confess his sufferings, give play to his taste for the arts, and enjoy the poetry he loved—pleasures denied him by the cares of his most ponderous royalty. There alone were his lofty soul and superior qualities appreciated; there alone, for a few brief months, the last of his life, could he know the joys of fatherhood, to which he abandoned himself with the frenzy which his presentiment of an imminent and terrible death lent to all his actions.

In the afternoon of this day, Marie was finishing her toilet in her oratory—the ladies' boudoir of that time. She was arranging the curls of her fine black hair, so as to leave a few locks to turn over a new velvet coif, and was looking attentively at herself in the mirror.

"It is nearly four o'clock! That interminable Council must be at an end by now," said she to herself. "Jacob is back from the Louvre, where they are greatly disturbed by reason of the number of councilors convened and by the duration of the sitting. What can have happened, some disaster? Dear heaven! does *he* know how the spirit is worn by waiting in vain? He is gone hunting, perhaps. If he is amused, all is well. If I see him happy, I shall forget my sorrows——"

She pulled down her bodice around her waist, that there might not be a wrinkle in it, and turned to see how her dress fitted in profile; but then she saw the King reclining on a couch. The carpeted floors deadened the sound of footsteps so effectually that he had come in without being heard.

"You startled me," she said, with a cry of surprise, which she instantly checked.

"You were thinking of me, then?" said the King.

"When am I not thinking of you?" she asked him, sitting down by his side.

She took off his cap and cloak, and passed her hands through his hair as if to comb it with her fingers. Charles submitted without speaking. Marie knelt down to study her royal master's pale face, and discerned in it the lines of terrible fatigue and of a more devouring melancholy than any she had ever been able to scare away. She checked a tear, and kept silence, not to irritate a grief she as yet knew nothing of by some ill-chosen word. She did what tender wives do in such cases; she kissed the brow seamed with precocious wrinkles and the hollow cheeks, trying to breathe the freshness of her own spirit into that careworn soul through its infusion into gentle caresses, which, however, had no effect. She raised her head to the level of the King's, embracing him fondly with her slender arms, and then laid her face on his laboring breast, waiting for the opportune moment to question the stricken man.

"My Charlot, will you not tell your poor anxious friend what are the thoughts that darken your brow and take the color from your dear, red lips?"

"With the exception of Charlemagne," said he, in a dull, hollow voice, "every King of France of the name of Charles has come to a miserable end."

"Pooh!" said she. "What of Charles VIII.?"

"In the prime of life," replied the King, "the poor man knocked his head against a low doorway in the Castle of Amboise, which he was decorating splendidly, and he died in dreadful pain.* His death gave the Crown to our branch."

"Charles VII. reconquered his kingdom."

"Child, he died"—and the King lowered his voice—"of starvation, in the dread of being poisoned by the Dauphin, who had already caused the death of his fair Agnes.

* April 7, 1498.

The father dreaded his son. Now, the son dreads his mother!"

"Why look back on the past?" said she, remembering the terrible existence of Charles VI.

"Why not, dear heart? Kings need not have recourse to diviners to read the fate that awaits them; they have only to study history. I am at this time engaged in trying to escape the fate of Charles the Simple, who was bereft of his crown, and died in prison after seven years' captivity."

"Charles V. drove out the English!" she cried triumphantly.

"Not he, but du Guesclin; for he, poisoned by Charles of Navarre, languished in sickness."

"But Charles IV.?" said she.

"He married three times and had no heir, in spite of the masculine beauty that distinguished the sons of Philip the Handsome. The first Valois dynasty ended in him. The second Valois will end in the same way. The Queen has only brought me a daughter, and I shall die without leaving any child to come, for a minority would be the greatest misfortune that could befall the kingdom. Beside, if I had a son, would he live? Charles is a name of ill-omen, Charlemagne exhausted all the luck attending it. If I could be King of France again, I would not be called Charles X."

"Who then aims at your crown?"

"My brother d'Alençon is plotting against me. I see enemies on every side——"

"Monsieur," said Marie, with an irresistible pout. "Tell me some merrier tales."

"My dearest treasure," said the King vehemently, "never call me *monsieur*, even in jest. You remind me of my mother, who incessantly offends me with that word. I feel as if she deprived me of my crown. She says 'My son' to the Duc d'Anjou; that is to say, the King of Poland."

"Sire," said Marie, folding her hands as if in prayer,

"there is a realm where you are adored, which your majesty fills entirely with glory and strength; and there the word monsieur means my gentle lord."

She unclasped her hands, and with a pretty action pointed to her heart. The words were so sweetly musical—*musiquées*, to use an expression of the period, applied to love-songs—that Charles took Marie by the waist, raised her with the strength for which he was noted, seated her on his knee, and gently rubbed his forehead against the curls his mistress had arranged with such care.

Marie thought this a favorable moment; she ventured on a kiss or two, which Charles allowed rather than accepted; then, between two kisses, she said—

"If my people told the truth, you were scouring Paris all night, as in the days when you played the scapegrace younger son?"

"Yes," said the King, who sat lost in thought.

"Did you not thrash the watch and rob certain good citizens? And who are the men placed under my guard, and who are such criminals that you have forbidden all communication with them? No girl was ever barred in with greater severity than these men, who have had neither food nor drink. Solern's Germans have not allowed any one to go near the room where you left them. Is it a joke? Or is it a serious matter?"

"Yes," said the King, rousing himself from his reverie, "last night I went scampering over the roofs with Tavannes and the Gondis. I wanted to have the company of my old comrades in folly. But our legs are not what they were; we did not dare jump across the streets. However, we crossed two courtyards by leaping from roof to roof. The last time, however, when we alighted on a gable close by this, as we clung to the bar of a chimney, we decided, Tavannes and I, that we could not do it again. If either of us had been alone, he would not have tried it."

"You were the first to jump, I will wager."

The King smiled.

"I know why you risk your life so."

"Hah, fair sorceress!"

"You are weary of life."

"Begone with witchcraft! I am haunted by it!" said the King, grave once more.

"My witchcraft is love," said she, with a smile. "Since the happy day when you first loved me, have I not always guessed your thoughts? And if you will suffer me to say so, the thoughts that torment you to-day are not worthy of a King."

"Am I a King?" said he bitterly.

"Can you not be a King? What did Charles VII. do, whose name you bear? He listened to his mistress, my lord, and he won back his kingdom, which was invaded by the English then as it is now by the adherents of the New Religion. Your last act of State opened the road you must follow: Exterminate heresy."

"You used to blame the stratagem," said Charles, "and now——"

"It is accomplished," she put in. "Beside, I am of Madame Catherine's opinion. It was better to do it yourself than to leave it to the Guises."

"Charles VII. had only men to fight against, but I have to battle with ideas," the King went on. "You may kill men; you cannot kill words? The Emperor Charles V. gave up the task; his son, Don Philip, is spending himself in the attempt. We shall die of it, we kings. On whom can I depend? On my right, with the Catholics, I find the Guises threatening me; on my left, the Calvinists will never forgive the death of my poor Father Coligny, nor the blood-letting of August; beside, they want to be rid of us altogether. And in front of me, my mother——"

"Arrest her; reign alone," said Marie, whispering in his ear.

"AM I A KING?" SAID HE, BITTERLY

"I wanted to do so yesterday—but I do not to-day. You speak of it lightly enough."

"There is no such great distance between the daughter of an apothecary and the daughter of a leech," said Marie Touchet, who would often laugh at the parentage falsely given her.

The King knit his brows.

"Marie, take no liberties. Catherine de' Medici is my mother, and you ought to tremble at——"

"But what are you afraid of?"

"Poison!" cried the King, beside himself.

"Poor boy!" said Marie, swallowing her tears, for so much strength united to so much weakness moved her deeply. "Oh!" she went on, "how you make me hate Madame Catherine, who used to seem so kind; but her kindness seems to be nothing but perfidy. Why does she do me so much good and you so much evil? While I was away in Dauphiné I heard a great many things about the beginning of your reign which you had concealed from me; and the Queen your mother seems to have been the cause of all your misfortunes."

"How?" said the King, with eager interest.

"Women whose soul and intentions are pure rule the men they love through their virtues; but women who do not truly wish them well find a motive power in their evil inclinations. Now the Queen has turned many fine qualities in you into vices, and made you believe that your bad ones were virtues. Was that acting a mother's part? Be a tyrant like Louis XI., make everybody dreadfully afraid of you, imitate Don Philip, banish the Italians, hunt out the Guises, and confiscate the estates of the Calvinists; you will rise to stand in solitude, and you will save the Crown. The moment is favorable; your brother is in Poland."

"We are two infants in politics," said Charles bitterly. "We only know how to love. Alas! dear heart, yesterday I

could think of all this; I longed to achieve great things. Puff! my mother has blown down my house of cards. From afar difficulties stand out as clearly as mountain peaks. I say to myself, 'I will put an end to Calvinism; I will bring Messieurs de Guise to their senses; I will cut adrift from the Court of Rome; I will rely wholly on the people of the middle-class;' in short, at a distance everything looks easy, but, when we try to climb the mountains, the nearer we get the more obstacles we discern.

"Calvinism in itself is the last thing the party-leaders care about; and the Guises, those frenzied Catholics, would be in despair if the Calvinists were really exterminated. Every man thinks of his own interests before all else, and religious opinions are but a screen for insatiable ambition. Charles IX.'s party is the weakest of all; those of the King of Navarre, of the King of Poland, of the Duc d'Alençon, of the Condés, of the Guises, of my mother, form coalitions against each other, leaving me alone even in the Council Chamber. In the midst of so many elements of disturbance my mother is the stronger, and she has just shown me that my plans are inane. We are surrounded by men who defy the law. The axe of Louis XI. of which you speak is not in our grasp. The Parlement would never sentence the Guises, nor the King of Navarre, nor the Condés, nor my brothers. It would think it was setting the kingdom in a blaze. What is wanted is the courage to command murder; the throne must come to that, with these insolent wretches who have nullified justice; but where can I find faithful hands? The Council I held this morning disgusted me with everything—treachery on all sides, antagonistic interests everywhere!

"I am tired of wearing the crown; all I ask is to die in peace."

And he sank into gloomy somnolence.

"Disgusted with everything!" echoed Marie Touchet sadly, but respecting her lover's heavy torpor.

Charles was, in fact, a prey to utter prostration of mind and body, resulting from over-fatigue of every faculty, and enhanced by the dejection caused by the vast scale of his misfortunes and the evident impossibility of overcoming them in the face of such a multiplicity of difficulties as genius itself takes alarm at. The King's depression was proportionate to the height to which his courage and his ideas had soared during the last few months; and now a fit of nervous melancholy, part, in fact, of his malady, had come over him as he left the long sitting of the Council he had held in his closet. Marie saw that he was suffering from a crisis when everything is irritating and importunate—even love; so she remained on her knees, her head in the King's lap, as he sat with his fingers buried in her hair without moving, without speaking, without sighing, and she was equally still. Charles IX. was sunk in the lethargy of helplessness; and Marie in the dark despair of a loving woman, who can see the border-line ahead where love must end.

Thus the lovers sat for some little time in perfect silence, in the mood when every thought is a wound, when the clouds of a mental storm hide even the remembrance of past happiness.

Marie believed herself to be in some sort to blame for this terrible dejection. She wondered, not without alarm, whether the King's extravagant joy at welcoming her back, and the vehement passion she could not contend with, were not helping to wreck his mind and frame. As she looked up at her lover, her eyes streaming with tears that bathed her face, she saw tears in his eyes too and on his colorless cheeks. This sympathy, uniting them even in sorrow, touched Charles IX. so deeply that he started up like a horse that feels the spur. He put his arm around Marie's waist, and before she knew what he was doing had drawn her down on to the sumptuous couch.

"I will be King no more!" he said. "I will be nothing

but your lover, and forget everything in that joy. I will die happy and not eaten up with the cares of a throne."

The tone in which he spoke, the fire that blazed in eyes just now so dull, instead of pleasing Marie, gave her a terrible pang; at that moment she blamed her love for contributing to the illness of which the King was dying.

"You forget your prisoners," said she, starting up suddenly.

"What do I care about the men? They have my permission to kill me."

"What? Assassins!" said she.

"Do not be uneasy, we have them safe, dear child. Now, think not of them, but of me. Say, do you not love me?" he inquired.

"Sire!" she cried.

"Sire!" he repeated, flashing sparks from his eyes, so violent was his first surge of fury at his mistress' ill-timed deference. "You are in collusion with my mother."

"Great God!" cried Marie, turning to the picture over her praying-chair, and trying to get to it to put up a prayer. "Oh! make him understand me!"

"What!" said the King sternly. "Have you any sin on your soul?"

And still holding her in his arms, he looked deep into her eyes. "I have heard of the mad passion of one d'Entragues for you," he went on, looking wildly at her, "and since their grandfather, Capitaine Balzac, married a Visconti of Milan, those rascals hesitate at nothing."

Marie gave the King such a look of pride that he was ashamed. Just then the cry was heard of the infant Charles de Valois from the adjoining room; he was just awake, and his nurse was no doubt bringing him to his mother.

"Come in, la Bourguignonne," said Marie, taking the child from his nurse and bringing him to the King. "You are more of a child than he," said she, half angry, but half appeased.

"He is a fine boy," said Charles IX., taking his son in his arms.

"No one but me can know how like you he is," said Marie. "He has your smile and ways already."

"What, so young?" said the King, smiling.

"Men will never believe such things," said she; "but look, my Charlot, play with him, look at him—now, am I not right?"

"It is true," said the King, startled by a movement on the infant's part, which struck him as the miniature reproduction of a trick of his own.

"Pretty flower!" said his mother. "He will never go away from me; he will never make me unhappy."

The King played with the child, tossing it, kissing it with entire devotion, speaking to it in those vague and foolish words, the onomatopœia of mothers and nurses; his voice was childlike, his brow cleared, joy came back to his saddened countenance; and when Marie saw that her lover had forgotten everything, she laid her head on his shoulder and whispered in his ear—

"Will you not tell me, my Charlot, why you put assassins in my keeping, and who these men are, and what you intend to do with them? And whither were you going across the roofs? I hope there was no woman in the case."

"Then you still love me so well?" said the King, caught by the bright flash of one of those questioning looks which women can give at a critical moment.

"You could doubt me?" asked she, as the tears gathered under her beautiful girlish eyelids.

"There are women in my adventure, but they are witches. Where was I?"

"We were quite near here, on the gable of a house," said Marie. "In what street?"

"In the Rue Saint-Honoré, my jewel," said the King, who seemed to have recovered himself, and who, as he recalled his

ideas, wanted to give his mistress some notion of the scene that was about to take place here. "As I crossed it in pursuit of some sport, my eyes were attracted by a bright light in a top window of the house inhabited by René, my mother's perfumer and glover—yours too, the whole Court's. I have strong suspicions as to what goes on in that man's house, and if I am poisoned that is where the poison is prepared."

"I give him up to-morrow," said Marie.

"What, you have still dealt with him since I left him?" said the King. "My life was here," he added gloomily, "and here no doubt they have arranged for my death."

"But, my dear boy, I have just come home from Dauphiné with our Dauphin," said she, with a smile, "and I have bought nothing of René since the Queen of Navarre died. Well, go on; you climbed up to René's roof——?"

"Yes," the King went on. "In a moment I, followed by Tavannes, had reached a spot whence, without being seen, I could see into the devil's kitchen, and note certain things which led me to take strong measures. Do you ever happen to have noticed the attics that crown that damned Florentine's house? All the windows to the street are constantly kept shut excepting the last, from which the Hôtel de Soissons can be seen, and the column my mother had erected for her astrologer, Cosmo Ruggieri. There is a room in this top story with a corridor lighted from the inner yard, so that, in order to see what is being done within, a man must get to a perch which no one would ever think of climbing, the coping of a high wall which ends against the roof of René's house. The creatures who placed the alembics there to distill death trusted to the faint hearts of the Parisians to escape inspection; but they counted without their Charles de Valois. I crept along the gutter, and supported myself against the window-jamb with my arm round the neck of a monkey that is sculptured on it."

"And what did you see, dear heart?" said Marie, in alarm.

"A low room where deeds of darkness are plotted," replied

the King. "The first thing on which my eyes fell was a tall, old man seated in a chair, with a magnificent beard like old l'Hôpital's, and dressed, like him, in black velvet. The concentrated rays of a brightly burning lamp fell on his high forehead, deeply furrowed by hollow lines, on a crown of white hair and a calm, thoughtful face, pale with vigils and study. His attention was divided between a manuscript on parchment several centuries old and two lighted stoves on which some heretical mixtures were cooking. Neither the floor nor the ceiling was visible; they were so covered with animals hung up there, skeletons, dried herbs, minerals, and drugs, with which the place was stuffed; here some books and retorts, with chests full of instruments for magic and astrology; there diagrams for horoscopes, phials, wax-figures, and, perhaps, the poisons he concocts for René in payment for the shelter and hospitality bestowed on him by my mother's glover.

"Tavannes and I were startled, I can tell you, at the sight of this diabolical arsenal; for merely at the sight of it one feels spellbound, and but that my business is to be King of France, I should have been frightened. 'Tremble for us both,' said I to Tavannes.

"But Tavannes' eyes were riveted on the most mysterious object. On a couch by the old man's side lay a girl at full length, of the strangest beauty, as long and slender as a snake, as white as an ermine, as pale as death, as motionless as a statue. Perhaps it was a woman just dug out of her grave, for she seemed to be still wrapped in her shroud; her eyes were fixed, and I could not see her breathe. The old wretch paid no sort of heed to her. I watched him so curiously that his spirit I believe passed into me. By dint of studying him, at last I admired that searching eye, keen and bold, in spite of the chills of age; that mouth, mobile with thoughts that came from what seemed a single fixed desire, graven in a myriad wrinkles. Everything in the man spoke of a hope which nothing can

discourage and nothing dismay. His attitude, motionless but full of thrilling life, his features so chiseled, so deeply cut by a passion that has done the work of the sculptor's tool, that mind dead-set on some criminal or scientific purpose, that searching intelligence on the track of nature though conquered by her, and bent, without having broken, under the burden of an enterprise it will never give up, threatening creation with fire borrowed from itself—— I was fascinated for a moment.

"That old man was more a king than I, for his eye saw the whole world and was its master. I am determined to temper no more swords; I want to float over abysses, as that old man does; his science seems to me a sovereignty. In short, I believe in these occult sciences."

"You, the eldest son, and the defender of the Holy Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church!" cried Marie.

"I."

"Why, what has come over you? Go on; I will be frightened for you, and you shall be brave for me."

"The old man looked at the clock and rose," the King went on. "He left the room, how I could not see, but I heard him open the window toward the Rue Saint-Honoré. Presently a light shone out, and then I saw another light, answering to the old man's, by which we could perceive Cosmo Ruggieri on the top of the column.

"'Oh, ho! They understand each other,' said I to Tavannes, who at once thought the whole affair highly suspicious, and was quite of my opinion that we should seize these two men, and at once make a search in their abominable workshop. But, before proceeding to a raid, we wanted to see what would happen. By the end of a quarter of an hour the door of the laboratory opened, and Cosmo Ruggieri, my mother's adviser—the bottomless pit in which all the Court secrets are buried, of whom wives crave help against their husbands and their lovers, and husbands and lovers take

counsel against faithless women, who gains money out of the past and the future, taking it from every one, who sells horoscopes, and is supposed to know everything—that half-demon came in, saying to the majestic-looking old man, 'Good-evening, brother.'

"He had with him a horrible little old woman, toothless, hunchbacked, crooked, and bent like a lady's marmoset, but far more hideous; she was wrinkled like a withered apple, her skin was of the color of saffron, her chin met her nose, her mouth was a hardly visible slit, her eyes were like the black spots of the deuce on dice, her brow expressed a bitter temper, her hair fell in gray locks from under a dirty coif; she walked with a crutch; she stank of devilry and the stake; and she frightened us, for neither Tavannes nor I believed that she was a real woman; God never made one so horrible as her.

"She sat down on a stool by the side of the fair white serpent with whom Tavannes was falling in love.

"The two brothers paid no heed to either the old woman or the young one, who, side by side, formed a horrible contrast. On one hand life in death, on the other death in life."

"My sweet poet!" cried Marie, kissing the King.

"'Good-evening, Cosmo,' the old alchemist replied. And then both looked at the stove. 'What is the power of the moon to-night?' the old man asked Cosmo. 'Why, dear Lorenzo,' my mother's astrologer replied, 'the high tides of September are not yet over; it is impossible to read anything in the midst of such confusion.' 'And what did the Orient say this evening?' 'He has just discovered,' said Cosmo, 'that there is a creative force in the air which gives back to the earth all it takes from it; he concludes, with us, that everything in this world is the outcome of a slow transformation, but all the various forms are of one and the same matter.' 'That is what my predecessor thought,' said Lorenzo. 'This morning Bernard Palissy was telling me that the metals

are a result of compression, and that fire, which parts all things, joins all things also; fire has the power of compressing as well as that of diffusing. That worthy has a spark of genius in him.'

"Though I was placed where I could not be seen, Cosmo went up to the dead girl, and, taking her hand, said, 'There is some one near! Who is it?' 'The King,' said she, very promptly.

"I at once showed myself, knocking on the window-pane; Ruggieri opened the window and I jumped into this wizard's kitchen, followed by Tavannes.

"'Yes, the King,' said I to the two Florentines, who seemed terror-stricken. 'In spite of your furnaces and books, your witches and your learning, you could not divine my visit. I am delighted to see the famous Lorenzo Ruggieri, of whom the Queen my mother speaks with such mystery,' said I to the old man, who rose and bowed. 'You are in this kingdom without my consent, my good man. Whom are you working for here, you, who from father to son have dwelt in the heart of the House of the Medici? Listen to me. You have your hand in so many purses that the most covetous would by this have had their fill of gold; you are far too cunning to plunge unadvisedly into criminal courses, but you ought not either to rush like feather-brains into this kitchen; you must have some secret schemes, you who are not content with gold or with power? Whom do you serve, God or the devil? What are you concocting here? I insist on the whole truth. I am honest man enough to hear and keep the secret of your undertakings, however blamable they may be. So tell me everything without concealment. If you deceive me, you will be sternly dealt with. But Pagan or Christian, Calvinist or Mohammedan, you have my royal word for it that you may leave the country unpunished, even if you have some peccadilloes to confess. At any rate, I give you the remainder of this night and to-morrow morning to examine your consciences, for you

are my prisoners, and you must now follow me to a place where you will be guarded like a treasure.'

"Before yielding to my authority, the two Florentines glanced at each other with a wily eye, and Lorenzo Ruggieri replied that I might be certain that no torture would wring their secrets from them; that in spite of their frail appearance, neither pain nor human feeling had any hold on them. Confidence alone could win from their lips what their mind had in its keeping. I was not to be surprised if at that moment they treated on an equal footing with a King who acknowledged no one above him but God, for that their ideas also came from God alone. Hence they demanded of me such confidence as they would grant. So, before pledging themselves to answer my questions without reserve, they desired me to place my left hand in the young girl's and my right hand in the old woman's. Not choosing to let them suppose that I feared any devilry, I put out my hands. Lorenzo took the right and Cosmo the left, and each placed one in the hand of a woman, so there I was like Jesus Christ between the two thieves. All the time the two witches were studying my hands, Cosmo held a mirror before me, desiring me to look at myself, while his brother talked to the two women in an unknown tongue. Neither Tavannes nor I could catch the meaning of a single sentence.

"We set seals on every entrance to this laboratory before bringing away the men, and Tavannes undertook to keep guard till Bernard Palissy and Chapelain, my physician-in-chief, shall go there to make a close examination of all the drugs stored or made there. It was to hinder their knowing anything of the search going on in their kitchen, and to prevent their communicating with any one whatever outside—for they might have sent some message to my mother—that I brought these two demons to be shut up here with Solern's Germans to watch them, who are as good as the stoutest prison-walls. René himself is confined to his room under the

eye of Solern's groom, and the two witches also. And now, sweetheart, as I hold the key of the Cabala, the kings of Thunes, the chiefs of witchcraft, the princes of Bohemia, the masters of the future, the inheritors of all the famous sooth-sayers, I will read and know your heart, and at last we will know what is to become of us."

"I shall be very glad if they can lay my heart bare," said Marie, without showing the least alarm.

"I know why necromancers do not frighten you; you cast spells yourself."

"Will you not have some of these peaches?" said she, offering him some fine fruit on a silver-gilt plate. "Look at these grapes and pears; I went myself to gather them all at Vincennes."

"Then I will eat some, for there can be no poison in them but the philters distilled from your fingers."

"You ought to eat much fruit, Charles; it would cool your blood, which you scorch by such violent living."

"And ought I not to love you less, too?"

"Perhaps——" said she. "If what you love is bad for you—and I have often thought so—I should find power in my love to refuse to let you have it. I adore Charles far more than I love the King, and I want the man to live without the troubles that make him sad and anxious."

"Royalty is destroying me."

"It is so," replied she. "If you were only a poor prince like your brother-in-law the King of Navarre, that wretched debauchee who has not a sou or a stitch of his own, who has merely a poor little kingdom in Spain where he will never set foot, and Béarn in France, which yields him scarcely enough to live on, I should be happy, much happier than if I were really Queen of France."

"But are you not much more than the Queen? King Charles is hers only for the benefit of the kingdom, for the Queen, after all, is part of our politics."

Marie smiled with a pretty little pout, saying—

"We all know that, my liege. And my sonnet—is it finished?"

"Dear child, it is as hard to write verses as to draw up an edict of pacification. I will finish them for you soon. Ah God! life sits lightly on me here; would I could never leave you! But I must, nevertheless, examine the two Florentines. By all the sacred relics, I thought one Ruggieri quite enough in France, and behold there are two! Listen, my dearest heart, you have good mother-wit, you would make a capital lieutenant of police, for you detect everything——"

"Well, Sire, we women take all we dread for granted, and to us what is probable is certain; there is all our subtlety in two words."

"Well, then, help me to fathom these two men. At this moment every determination I may come to depends on this examination. Are they innocent? Are they guilty? Behind them stands my mother."

"I hear Jacob on the winding stair," said Marie.

Jacob was the King's favorite body-servant, who accompanied him in all his amusements; he now came to ask whether his master would wish to speak with the two prisoners.

At a nod of consent, the mistress of the house gave some orders.

"Jacob," said she, "make every one in the place leave the house, except the nurse and Monsieur le Dauphin d'Auvergne —they may stay. Do you remain in the room downstairs; but first of all shut the windows, draw the curtains, and light the candles."

The King's impatience was so great that, while these preparations were being made, he came to take his place on a large settle, and his pretty mistress seated herself by his side in the nook of a wide, white marble chimney-place, where a bright fire blazed on the hearth. In the place of a mirror hung a portrait of the King, in a red velvet frame. Charles rested

his elbow on the arm of the seat, to contemplate the two Italians at his ease.

The shutters closed, and the curtains drawn, Jacob lighted the candles in a sort of candelabrum of chased silver, placing it on a table at which the two Florentines took their stand—seeming to recognize the candlestick as the work of their fellow-townsman, Benvenuto Cellini. Then the effect of this rich room, decorated in the King's taste, was really brilliant. The russet tone of the tapestries looked better than by daylight. The furniture, elegantly carved, reflected the light of the candles and of the fire in its shining bosses. The gilding, judiciously introduced, sparkled here and there like eyes, and gave relief to the brown coloring that predominated in this nest for lovers.

Jacob knocked twice, and at a word brought in the two Florentines. Marie Touchet was immediately struck by the grand presence which distinguished Lorenzo in the sight of great and small alike. This austere and venerable man, whose silver beard was relieved against an overcoat of black velvet, had a forehead like a marble dome. His severe countenance, with two black eyes that darted points of fire, inspired a thrill as of a genius emerged from the deepest solitude, and all the more impressive because its power was not dulled by contact with other men. It was as the steel of a blade that has not yet been used.

Cosmo Ruggieri wore the Court dress of the period. Marie nodded to the King, to show him that he had not exaggerated the picture, and to thank him for introducing her to this extraordinary man. "I should have liked to see the witches, too," she whispered.

Charles IX., sunk again in brooding, made no reply; he was anxiously flipping off some crumbs of bread that happened to lie on his doublet and hose.

"Your science cannot work on the sky, nor compel the sun to shine, Messieurs de Florence," said the King, pointing

to the curtains which had been drawn to shut out the gray mist of Paris. "There is no daylight."

"Our science, Sire, enables us to make a sky as we will," said Lorenzo Ruggieri. "The weather is always fair for those who work in a laboratory by the light of a furnace."

"That is true," said the King. "Well, father," said he, using a word he was accustomed to employ to old men, "explain to us very clearly the object of your studies."

"Who will guarantee us impunity?"

"The word of a King!" replied Charles, whose curiosity was greatly excited by this question.

Lorenzo Ruggieri seemed to hesitate, and Charles exclaimed—

"What checks you? we are alone."

"Is the King of France here?" asked the old man.

Charles IX. reflected for a moment, then he replied, "No."

"But will he not come?" Lorenzo urged.

"No," replied Charles, restraining an impluse of rage.

The imposing old man took a chair and sat down. Cosmo, amazed at his boldness, dared not imitate his brother.

Charles IX. said, with severe irony—

"The King is not here, monsieur, but you are in the presence of a lady for whose permission you ought to wait."

"The man you see before you, madame," said the grand old man, "is as far above kings as kings are above their subjects, and you shall find me courteous, even when you know my power."

Hearing these bold words, spoken with Italian emphasis, Charles and Marie looked at each other and then at Cosmo, who, with his eyes fixed on his brother, seemed to be asking himself, "How will he get himself out of the awkward position we are in?"

In fact, one person only could appreciate the dignity and skill of Lorenzo Ruggieri's first move; not the King, nor his

young mistress, over whom the elder man had cast the spell of his audacity, but his not less wily brother Cosmo. Though he was superior to the cleverest men at Court, and perhaps to his patroness Catherine de' Medici, the astrologer knew Lorenzo to be his master.

The learned old man, buried in solitude, had gauged the sovereigns of the earth, almost all of them wearied out by the perpetual shifting of politics; for at that time great crises were so sudden, so far reaching, so fierce, and so unexpected! He knew their satiety, their lassitude; he knew with what eagerness they pursued all that was new, strange, or uncommon; and, above all, how glad they were to rise now and then to intellectual regions so as to escape from the perpetual struggle with men and things. To those who have exhausted politics, nothing remains but abstract thought; this Charles V. had proved by his abdication.

Charles IX., who made sonnets and swords to recreate himself after the absorbing business of an age when the Throne was in not less ill-odor than the King, and when royalty had only its cares and none of its pleasures, could not but be strangely startled by Lorenzo's audacious negation of his power. Religious impiety had ceased to be surprising at a time when Catholicism was closely inquired into; but the subversion of all religion, assumed as a groundwork for the wild speculations of mystical arts, naturally amazed the King and roused him from his gloomy absence of mind. Beside, a victory to be won over mankind was an undertaking which would make every other interest seem trivial in the eyes of the Ruggieri. An important debt to be paid depended on this idea to be suggested to the King; the brothers could not ask for this, and yet they must obtain it. The first thing was to make Charles IX. forget his suspicions by making him jump at some new idea.

The two Italians knew full well that in this strange game their lives were at stake; and the glances—deferent but proud

—that they exchanged with Marie and the King, whose looks were keen and suspicious, were a drama in themselves.

"Sire," said Lorenzo Ruggieri, "you have asked for the truth. But to show her to you naked, I must bid you sound the well, the pit, from which she will rise. I pray you let the gentleman, the poet, forgive us for saying what the Eldest Son of the Church* may regard as blasphemy—I do not believe that God troubles Himself about human affairs."

Though fully resolved to preserve his sovereign indifference, Charles IX. could not control a gesture of surprise.

"But for that conviction, I should have no faith in the miraculous work to which I have devoted myself. But, to carry it out, I must believe it; and if the hand of God rules all things, I am a madman. So, be it known to the King, we aim at winning a victory over the immediate course of human nature.

"I am an alchemist, Sire; but do not suppose, with the vulgar, that I am striving to make gold. The composition of gold is not the end, but only an incident of our researches; else we should not call our undertaking *magnum opus*, the great work. The great work is something far more ambitious than that. If I, at this day, could recognize the presence of God in matter, the fire of the furnaces that have been burning for centuries would be extinguished to-morrow at my bidding.

"But make no mistake—to deny the direct interference of God is not to deny God. We place the Creator of all things far above the level to which religions reduce Him. Those who hope for immortality are not to be accused of atheism. Following the example of Lucifer, we are jealous of God, and jealousy is a proof of violent love. Though this doctrine lies at the root of our labors, all adepts do not accept it. Cosmo," said the old man, indicating his brother, "Cosmo is devout; he pays for masses for the repose of our father's soul, and he

*A title of the Kings of France.

goes to hear them. Your mother's astrologer believes in the divinity of Christ, in the immaculate conception, and in transubstantiation; he believes in the Pope's indulgences, and in hell—he believes in an infinite number of things. His hour is not yet come, for I have read his horoscope; he will live to be nearly a hundred. He will live through two reigns, and see two kings of France assassinated——"

"Who will be——?" asked the King.

"The last of the Valois and the first of the Bourbons," replied Lorenzo. "But Cosmo will come to my way of thinking. In fact, it is impossible to be an alchemist and a Catholic; to believe in the dominion of man over matter, and in the supreme power of mind."

"Cosmo will live to be a hundred?" said the King, knitting his brows in the terrible way that was his wont.

"Yes, Sire," said Lorenzo decisively. "He will die peacefully in his bed."

"If it is in your power to predict the moment of your death, how can you be ignorant of the result of your inquiries?" asked the King. And he smiled triumphantly as he looked at Marie Touchet.

The brothers exchanged a swift look of satisfaction.

"He is interested in alchemy," thought they, "so we are safe."

"Our prognostics are based on the existing relations of man to nature; but the very point we aim at is the complete alteration of those relations," replied Lorenzo.

The King sat thinking.

"But if you are sure that you must die, you are assured of defeat," said Charles IX.

"As our predecessors were," replied Lorenzo, lifting his hand and letting it drop with a solemn and emphatic gesture, as dignified as his thoughts. "But your mind has rushed on to the goal of our attempt, Sire; we must come back again, Sire! Unless you know the ground on which our edifice is

erected, you may persist in saying that it will fall, and judge this science, which has been pursued for centuries by the greatest minds, as the vulgar judge it."

The King bowed assent.

"I believe, then, that this earth belongs to man, that he is master of it, and may appropriate all the forces, all the elements thereof. Man is not a creature proceeding directly from the hand of God, but the result of the principle diffused throughout the infinite ether, wherein myriads of beings are produced; and these have no resemblance to each other between star and star, because the conditions of life are everywhere different. Ay, my liege, the motion we call life has its source beyond all visible worlds; creation draws from it as the surrounding conditions may require, and the minutest beings share in it by taking all they are able, at their own risk and peril; it is their part to defend themselves from death. This is the sum-total of alchemy.

"If man, the most perfect animal on this globe, had within him a fraction of the Godhead, he could not perish—but he does perish. To escape from this dilemma, Socrates and his school invented the soul. I—the successor of the great unknown kings who have ruled this science—I am for the old theories against the new; I believe in the transmutation of matter which I can see, as against the eternity of a soul which I cannot see. I do not acknowledge the world of souls. If such a world existed, the substances of which the beautiful combination, produces your body—and which in madame are so dazzling—would not separate and resolve themselves after your death to return each to its own place; the water to water, the fire to fire, the metal to metal, just as when my charcoal is burnt its elements are restored to their original molecules.

"Though you say that something lives on, it is not we ourselves; all that constitutes our living self perishes.

"Now, it is my living self that I desire to perpetuate beyond the common term of life; it is the present manifestation

for which I want to secure longer duration. What! trees live for centuries, and men shall live but for years, while those are passive and we are active; while they are motionless and speechless, and we walk and talk! No creature on earth ought to be superior to us either in power or permanency. We have already expanded our senses; we can see into the stars. We ought to be able to extend our life. I place life above power. Of what use is power if life slips from us?

"A rational man ought to have no occupation but that of seeking—not whether there is another life—but the secret on which our present life is based, so as to be able to prolong it at will! This is the desire that has silvered my hair. But I walk on boldly in the darkness, leading to battle those intellects which share my faith. Life will some day be ours."

"But how?" cried the King, starting to his feet.

"The first condition of our faith is the belief that this world is for man; you must grant me that," said Lorenzo.

"Well and good, so be it!" said Charles de Valois, impatient, but already fascinated.

"Well, then, Sire, if we remove God from this world, what is left but man? Now let us survey our domain. The material world is composed of elements; those elements have a first principle within them. All these principles resolve themselves into one which is gifted with motion. The number three is the formula of creation: Matter, Motion, Production!"

"Proof, proof? Pause there!" cried the King.

"Do you not see the effects?" replied Lorenzo. "We have analyzed in our crucibles the acorn from which an oak would have risen as well as the embryo which would have become a man; from these small masses of matter a pure element was derived to which some force, some motion would have been added. In the absence of a Creator, must not that first principle be able to assume the external forms which constitute our world? For the phenomena of life are every-

where the same. Yes, in metals, as in living beings, in plants as in man, life begins by an imperceptible embryo which develops spontaneously. There is a first principle! We must detect it at the point where it acts on itself, where it is one, where it is a principle before it is a creature, a cause before it is an effect; then we shall see it absolute—formless, but capable of assuming all the forms we see it take.

"When we are face to face with this particle or atom, and have detected its motion from the starting-point, we shall know its laws; we are thenceforth its masters and able to impose on it the form we may choose, among all we see; we shall possess gold, having the world, and can give ourselves centuries of life to enjoy our wealth. That is what we seek, my disciples and I. All our powers, all our thoughts are directed to that search; nothing diverts us from it. One hour wasted on any other passion would be stolen from our greatness! You have never found one of your hunting-dogs neglectful of the game or the death, and I have never known one of my persevering subjects diverted by a woman or a thought of greed.

"If the adept craves for gold and power, that hunger comes of our necessities; he clutches at fortune as a thirsty hound snatches a moment from the chase to drink, because his retorts demand a diamond to consume or ingots to be reduced to powder. Each one has his line of work. This one seeks the secret of vegetable nature, he studies the torpid life of plants, he notes the parity of motion in every species and the parity of nutrition; in every case he discerns that sun, air, and water are needed for fertility and nourishment. Another investigates the blood of animals. A third studies the laws of motion generally and its relation to the orbits of the stars. Almost all love to struggle with the intractable nature of metals; for though we find various elements in everything, we always find metals the same throughout, down to their minutest particles.

"Hence the common error as to our labors. Do you see all these patient toilers, these indefatigable athletes, always vanquished, and always returning to the assault? Humanity, Sire, is at our heels, as your huntsman is at the heels of the pack. It cries to us, 'Hurry on! Overlook nothing! Sacrifice everything, even a man—you who sacrifice yourselves! Hurry onward! Cut off the head and hands of Death, my foe.'

"Yes, Sire, we are animated by a sentiment on which depends the happiness of generations to come. We have buried many men—and what men!—who have died in the pursuit. When we set foot on that road it is not to work for ourselves: we may perish without discovering the secret. And what a death is that of a man who does not believe in a future life! We are glorious martyrs; we bear the selfishness of the whole race in our hearts; we live in our successors. On our way we discover secrets which enrich the mechanical and liberal arts. Our furnaces shed gleams of light which help society to possess more perfect forms of industry. Gunpowder was discovered in our retorts; we shall conquer the thunder yet. Our patient vigils may overthrow politics."

"Can that be possible?" cried the King, sitting up again on the settle.

"Why not?" replied the Grand Master of the New Templars. "*Tradidit mundum disputationibus!* (God has given us the world.) Listen to this once again! Man is lord on earth, and matter is his. Every means, every power is at his service. What created us? A motion. What power keeps life in us? A motion. And should not science grasp this motion? Nothing on earth is lost, nothing flies off from our planet to go elsewhere; if it were so, the stars would fall on one another. The waters of the Deluge are all here, and not a drop lost. Around us, above, below, are the elements whence have proceeded the innumerable millions of men who have trodden the earth, before and since the Deluge. What

is it that remains to be done? To detect the disintegrating force; on the other hand, to discover the combining force. We are the outcome of a visible toil. When the waters covered our globe, men came forth from them who found the elements of life in the earth's covering, in the atmosphere, and in food. Earth and air, then, contain the first principle of human transformations; these go on under our eyes, by the agency of what is under our eyes; hence we can discover the secret by not confining our efforts to the span of one man's life, but making the task endure as long as mankind itself. We have, in fact, attacked matter as a whole; Matter, in which I believe, and which I, Grand Master of our Order, am bent on penetrating.

"Christopher Columbus gave a world to the King of Spain; I am seeking to give the King of France a people that shall never die. I, an outpost on the remotest frontier which cuts us off from the knowledge of things, a patient student of atoms, I destroy forms, I dissolve the bonds of every combination, I imitate Death to enable me to imitate Life. In short, I knock incessantly at the door of Creation, and shall still knock till my latest day. When I die, my knocker will pass into other hands not less indefatigable, as unknown giants bequeathed it to me.

"Fabulous images, never understood, such as those of Prometheus, of Ixion, of Adonis, of Pan, etc., which are part of the religious beliefs of every people and in every age, show us that this hope had its birth with the human race. Chaldæa, India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and the Moors have transmitted Magian lore, the highest of all the occult sciences, the storehouse of the results of generations of watchers. Therein lay the bond of the noble and majestic Order of the Temple. When he burned the Templars, a predecessor of yours, Sire, only burned men; their secrets remain with us. The reconstruction of the Temple is the watchword of an unrecognized people, a race of intrepid seekers, all looking to the Orient

of life, all brethren, all inseparable, united by an idea, stamped with the seal of toil. I am the sovereign of this people, their chief by election and not by birth. I guide them all toward the essence of life! Grand Master, Rosicrucians, companions, adepts, we all pursue the invisible molecule which escapes our crucibles, and still evades our sight; but we shall make ourselves eyes manifold more powerful than those bestowed on us by nature; we shall get to the primitive atom, the corpuscular element so perseveringly sought by all the sages who have preceded us in the sublime pursuit.

"Sire, when a man stands astride on that abyss, and has at his command divers so intrepid as my brethren, other human interests look very small; hence, we are not dangerous. Religious disputes and political struggles are far from us; we are immeasurably beyond them. Those who contend with nature do not condescend to take men by the throat.

"Moreover, every result in our science is appreciable; we can measure every effect, we can predict it, whereas in the combinations which include men and their interests everything is unstable. We shall submit the diamond to our crucible; we shall make diamonds; we shall make gold! Like one of our craft at Barcelona, we shall make ships move by the help of a little water and fire. We shall dispense with the wind, nay, we shall make the wind, we shall make light and renew the face of empires by new industries. But we will never stoop to mount a throne to be *gehennaed* by nations."

Notwithstanding his desire to avoid being entrapped by Florentine cunning, the King, as well as his simple-minded mistress, was by this time caught and carried away in the rhetoric and rhodomontade of this pompous and specious flow of words. The lovers' eyes betrayed how much they were dazzled by the vision of mysterious riches spread out before them; they saw, as it were, subterranean caverns in long perspective full of toiling gnomes. The impatience of curiosity dissipated the alarms of suspicion.

"But, then," exclaimed the King, "you are great politicians, and can enlighten us."

"No, Sire," said Lorenzo simply.

"Why not?" asked the King.

"Sire, it is given to no one to be able to predict what will come of a concourse of some thousands of men; we may be able to tell what one man will do, how long he will live, and whether he will be lucky or unlucky; but we cannot tell how several wills thrown together will act, and any calculation of the swing of their interests is even more difficult, for interests are men *plus* things; only in solitude can we discern the general aspect of the future. The Protestantism that is devouring you will be devoured in its turn by its practical outcome, which, in its day, will become a theory, too. Europe, so far, has not gone further than religion; to-morrow it will attack royalty."

"Then the night of Saint-Bartholomew was a great conception?"

"Yes, Sire; for when the people triumph, they will have their Saint-Bartholomew. When religion and royalty are swept away, the people will attack the great, and after the great they will fall upon the rich. Finally, when Europe is no more than a dismembered herd of men for lack of leaders, it will be swallowed up by vulgar conquerors. The world has presented a similar spectacle twenty times before, and Europe is beginning again. Ideas devour the ages as men are devoured by their passions. When man is cured, human nature will cure itself perhaps. Science is the soul of mankind, and we are its pontiffs; and those who study the soul care but little for the body."

"How far have you gone?" asked the King of this strange and learned man.

"We move but slowly; but we never lose what we have once conquered."

"So you, in fact, are the King of the Wizards," said

Charles IX., piqued at finding himself so small a personage in the presence of this man.

The imposing Grand Master of Adepts flashed a look at him that left him thunder-stricken.

"You are the King of men," replied he; "I am the King of ideas. Beside, if there were real wizards, you could not have burned them!" he added, with a touch of irony. "We too have our martyrs."

"But by what means," the King went on, "do you cast nativities? How did you know that the man near your window last night was the King of France? What power enabled one of your race to foretell to my mother the fate of her three sons? Can you, the Grand Master of the Order that would fain knead the world—can you, I say, tell me what the Queen my mother is thinking at this moment?"

"Yes, Sire."

The answer was spoken before Cosmo could pull his brother's coat to warn him.

"You know why my brother, the King of Poland, is returning home?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And why?"

"To take your place."

"Our bitterest enemies are our own kith and kin," cried the King, starting up in a fury and striding up and down the room. "Kings have no brothers, no sons, no mother! Coligny was right; my executioners are in the conventicles, they are at the Louvre. You are either impostors or regicides! Jacob, call in Solern."

"My lord!" said Marie Touchet, "the Ruggieri have your word of honor. You have chosen to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge; do not complain of its bitterness."

The King smiled with an expression of deep contempt; his material sovereignty seemed small in his eyes in comparison

with the supreme intellectual sovereignty of old Lorenzo Ruggieri. Charles IX. could scarcely govern France; the Grand Master of the Rosicrucians commanded an intelligent and submissive people.

"Be frank; I give you my word as a gentleman that your reply, even if it should contain the avowal of the worst crimes, shall be as though it had never been spoken," the King said. "Do you study poisons?"

"To know what will secure life, it is needful to know what will cause death."

"You have the secret of many poisons?"

"Yes, but in theory only, and not in practice; we know them, but do not use them."

"Has my mother asked for any?"

"The Queen-mother, Sire, is far too clever to have recourse to such means. She knows that the sovereign who uses poison shall perish by poison; the Borgias, and Bianca, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, are celebrated examples of the dangers incurred by those who use such odious means. At Court everything is known. You can kill a poor wretch outright; of what use, then, is it to poison him? But if you attempt the life of conspicuous persons, what chance is there of secrecy? Nobody could have fired at Coligny but you, or the Queen-mother, or one of the Guises. No one made any mistake about that. Take my word for it, in politics poison cannot be used twice with impunity; beside, princes always have successors.

"As to smaller men, if, like Luther, they become sovereigns by the power of ideas, by killing them you do not kill their doctrine. The Queen is a Florentine; she knows that poison can only be the instrument of private vengeance. My brother, who has never left her since she came to France, knows how deeply Madame Diane aggrieved her; she never thought of poisoning her, and she could have done so. What would the King your father have said? No woman would

have been more thoroughly justified or more certain of impunity. But Madame de Valentinois is alive to this day."

"And the magic of wax images?" asked the King.

"Sire," said Cosmo, "those figures are so entirely innocuous that we lend ourselves to such magic to satisfy blind passions, like physicians who give bread-pills to persons who fancy themselves sick. A desperate woman imagines that by stabbing the heart of an image she brings disaster on the faithless lover it represents. What can we say! These are our taxes."

"The Pope sells indulgences," said Lorenzo Ruggieri, smiling.

"Does my mother make use of such images?"

"Of what use would such futile means be to her who can do what she will?"

"Could Queen Catherine save you at this moment?" asked Charles ominously.

"We are in no danger, Sire," said Lorenzo calmly. "I knew before I entered this house that I should leave it safe and sound, as surely as I know the ill-feeling that the King will bear my brother a few days hence; but, even if he should run some risk, he will triumph. Though the King reigns by the sword, he also reigns by justice," he added, in allusion to the famous motto on a medal struck for Charles IX.

"You know everything; I shall die before long, and that is well," returned the King, hiding his wrath under feverish impatience. "But how will my brother die, who, according to you, is to be Henri III.?"

"A violent death."

"And Monsieur d'Alençon?"

"He will never reign."

"Then Henri de Bourbon will be King?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And what death will he die?"

"A violent death."

"And when I am dead, what will become of madame?" asked the King, turning to Marie Touchet.

"Madame de Belleville will marry, Sire."

"You are impostors! Send them away, my lord," said Marie Touchet.

"Dear heart, the Ruggieri have my word as a gentleman," said Charles, smiling. "Will Marie have children?"

"Yes—and madame will live to be more than eighty."

"Must I have them hanged?" said the King to his mistress. "And my son, the Comte d'Auvergne?" said Charles, rising to fetch the child.

"Why did you tell him that I should marry?" said Marie Touchet to the two brothers during the few moments when they were alone.

"Madame," replied Lorenzo with dignity, "the King required us to tell the truth, and we told it."

"Then it is true?" said she.

"As true as that the Governor of Orleans loves you to distraction."

"But I do not love him," cried she.

"That is true, madame," said Lorenzo. "But your horoscope shows that you are to marry the man who at this present loves you."

"Could you not tell a little lie for my sake?" said she with a smile. "For if the King should believe your forecast he might——"

"Is it not necessary that he should believe in our innocence?" said Cosmo, with a glance full of meaning. "The precautions taken by the King against us have given us reason, during the time we spent in your pretty gaol, to suppose that the occult sciences must have been maligned in his ears."

"Be quite easy," replied Marie; "I know him, and his doubts are dispelled."

"We are innocent," said the old man haughtily.

"So much the better; for at this moment the King is

having your laboratory searched and your crucibles and phials examined by experts."

The brothers looked at each other and smiled.

Marie took this smile for the irony of innocence; but it meant: "Poor simpletons! Do you suppose that if we know how to prepare poisons, we do not also know how to conceal them?"

"Where are the King's people, then?" asked Cosmo.

"In René's house," replied Marie; and the Ruggieri exchanged a glance which conveyed from each to each the same thought, "The Hotel de Soissons is inviolable!"

The King had so completely thrown off his suspicions, that when he went to fetch his son, and Jacob intercepted him to give him a note written by Chapelain, he opened it in the certainty of finding in it what his physician told him concerning his visit to the laboratory, where all that had been discovered bore solely on alchemy.

"Will he live happy?" asked the King, showing his infant son to the two alchemists.

"This is Cosmo's concern," said Lorenzo, turning to his brother.

Cosmo took the child's little hand and studied over it very carefully.

"Monsieur," said Charles IX. to the elder man, "if you are compelled to deny the existence of the spirit to believe that your enterprise is possible, tell me how it is that you can doubt that which constitutes your power. The mind you desire to annihilate is the torch that illumines your search. Ah, ha! Is not that moving while denying the fact of motion?" cried he, and, pleased at having hit on this argument, he looked triumphantly at his mistress.

"Mind," said Lorenzo Ruggieri, "is the exercise of an internal sense, just as the faculty of seeing various objects and appreciating their form and color is the exercise of our sight. That has nothing to do with what is assumed as to

another life. Mind—thought—is a faculty which may cease even during life with the forces that produce it."

"You are logical," said the King with surprise. "But alchemy is an atheistical science."

"Materialist, Sire, which is quite a different thing. Materialism is the outcome of the Indian doctrines transmitted through the mysteries of Isis to Chaldæa and Egypt, and brought back to Greece by Pythagoras, one of the demi-gods among men; his doctrine of transmigration is the mathematics of materialism, the living law of its phases. Each of the different creations which make up the earthly creation possesses the power of retarding the impulse that drags it into another form."

"Then alchemy is the science of sciences!" cried Charles IX., fired with enthusiasm. "I must see you at work."

"As often as you will, Sire. You cannot be more eager than the Queen your mother."

"Ah! That is why she is so much attached to you!" cried the King.

"The House of Medici has secretly encouraged our research for almost a century past."

"Sire," said Cosmo, "this child will live nearly a hundred years; he will meet with some checks, but will be happy and honored, having in his veins the blood of the Valois."

"I will go to see you," said the King, who had recovered his good humor. "You can go."

The brothers bowed to Marie and Charles IX. and withdrew. They solemnly descended the stairs, neither looking at each other nor speaking; they did not even turn to look up at the windows from the courtyard, so sure were they that the King's eye was on them; and, in fact, as they turned to pass through the gate, they saw Charles IX. at a window.

As soon as the alchemist and the astrologer were in the Rue de l'Autruche, they cast a look in front and behind to see that no one was either following them or waiting for them,

and went on as far as the Louvre moat without speaking a word; but there, finding that they were alone, Lorenzo said to Cosmo in the Florentine Italian of the time—

"*Affè d'Iddio! como le abbiamo infinocchiato!*" (By God, we have caught them finely!)

"*Gran mercés! a lui sta di spartojarsi*"—(Much good may it do him; he must make what he can of it)—said Cosmo. "May the Queen do as much for me! We have done a good stroke for her."

Some days after this scene, which had struck Marie Touchet no less than the King, in one of those moments when in the fullness of joy the mind is in some sort released from the body, Marie exclaimed—

"Charles, I understand Lorenzo Ruggieri; but Cosmo said nothing."

"That is true," said the King, startled by this sudden flash of light, "and there was as much falsehood as truth in what they said. Those Italians are as slippery as the silk they spin."

This suspicion explains the hatred of Cosmo that the King betrayed on the occasion of the trial on the conspiracy of la Mole and Coconnas. When he found that Cosmo was one of the contrivers of that plot, the King believed himself duped by the two Italians; for it proved to him that his mother's astrologer did not devote himself exclusively to studying the stars, fulminating powder and final atoms. Lorenzo had then left the country.

In spite of many persons' incredulity of such things, the events which followed this scene confirmed the prophecies uttered by the Ruggieri.

The King died three months later. The Comte de Gondi followed Charles IX. to the tomb, as he had been told that he would by his brother, the Maréchal de Retz, a friend of the Ruggieri, and a believer in their foresight.

Marie Touchet married Charles de Balzac, Marquis d'Entragues, Governor of Orleans, by whom she had two daughters. The more famous of these two, the Comte d'Auvergne's half-sister, was Henri IV.'s mistress, and at the time of Biron's conspiracy tried to place her brother on the throne of France and oust the Bourbons.

The Comte d'Auvergne, made Duc d'Angoulême, lived till the reign of Louis XIV. He coined money in his province, altering the superscription; but Louis XIV. did not interfere, illegal as it was, so great was his respect for the blood of the Valois.

Cosmo lived till after the accession of Louis XIII.; he saw the fall of the House of Medici in France and the overthrow of the Concini. History has taken care to record that he died an atheist—that is to say, a materialist.

The Marquise d'Entragues was more than eighty when she died.

Lorenzo and Cosmo had for their disciple the famous Comte de Saint-Germain, who became notorious under Louis XV. The great alchemist was not less than a hundred and thirty years old, the age to which some biographers say Marion Delorme attained. The Count may have heard from the Ruggieri anecdotes of the Massacre of Saint-Bartholomew and of the reigns of the Valois, in which they could at pleasure assume a part by speaking in the first person. The Comte de Saint-Germain is the last professor of alchemy who explained the science well, but he left no writings. The doctrine of the Cabala set forth in this volume was derived from that mysterious personage.

It is a strange thing! Three men's lives, that of the old man from whom this information was obtained, that of the Comte de Saint-Germain, and that of Cosmo Ruggieri, embrace European history from the reign of Francis I. to that of Napoleon. Only fifty lives of equal length would cover the time to as far back as the first known epoch of the world.

"What are fifty generations for studying the mysteries of life?" the Comte de Saint-Germain used to say.

PARIS, *November-December*, 1836.

[NOTE.—Charles de Balzac, mentioned on page 323, was not in any way connected with the family of the author. The Comte d'Auvergne, Duc d'Angoulême, was, of course, the child of Charles IX. and Marie Touchet.]

PART III.

THE TWO DREAMS.

In 1786 Bodard de Saint-James, treasurer to the Navy, was of all the financiers of Paris the one whose luxury gave rise to most remark and gossip. At that time he was building his famous Folly at Neuilly, and his wife bought, to crown the tester of her bed, a plume of feathers of which the price had dismayed the Queen. It was far easier then than now to make one's self the fashion and be talked of by all Paris; a witticism was often quite enough, or the caprice of a woman.

Bodard lived in the fine house in the Place Vendôme which the farmer-general Dangé had not long since been compelled to quit. This notorious epicurean was lately dead; and on the day when he was buried, Monsieur de Bièvre, his intimate friend, had found matter for a jest, saying that now one could cross the Place Vendôme without danger (or Dangé). This allusion to the terrific gambling that went on in the deceased man's house was his funeral oration. The house is that opposite to the Chancellerie.

To complete Bodard's history as briefly as possible, he was a poor creature, he failed for fourteen millions of francs after the Prince de Guéménée. His clumsiness in not anticipating that serene bankruptcy—to use an expression of Lebrun-Pindare's—led to his never even being mentioned. He died in a garret, like Bourvalais, Bouret, and many others.

Madame de Saint-James indulged an ambition of never receiving any but people of quality—a stale absurdity that is ever new. To her the cap of a lawyer in the Parlement was but a small affair; she wanted to see her rooms filled with persons of title who had at least the minor privileges of *entrée* at Versailles. To say that many blue ribbons were to be seen in

the lady's house would be untrue; but it is quite certain that she had succeeded in winning the civility and attention of some members of the Rohan family, as was proved subsequently in the too famous case of the Queen's necklace.

One evening—it was, I believe, in August, 1786—I was greatly surprised to see in this millionaire's room, precise as she was in the matter of proofs of rank, two new faces, which struck me as being of decidedly inferior birth.

She came up to me as I stood in a window recess, where I had intentionally ensconced myself.

"Do tell me," said I, with a questioning glance at one of these strangers, "who is that specimen? How did he get into your house?"

"He is a charming man."

"Do you see him through the prism of love, or am I mistaken in him?"

"You are not mistaken," she replied, laughing; "he is as ugly as a toad; but he has done me the greatest service a woman can accept from a man."

As I looked at her with mischievous meaning, she hastened to add—"He has entirely cured me of the ugly red patches which spoilt my complexion and made me look like a peasant woman."

I shrugged my shoulders with disgust.

"A quack!" I exclaimed.

"No," said she, "he is a physician to the Court pages. He is clever and amusing, I assure you; and he has written books too. He is a very learned physicist."

"If his literary style is like his face!" said I, smiling. "And the other?"

"What other?"

"That little prim man, as neat as a doll, and who looks as if he drank verjuice."

"He is a man of good family," said she. "He has come from some province—I forget which. Ah! yes, from Artois.

He is in Paris to wind up some affair that concerns the cardinal, and his eminence has just introduced him to Monsieur de Saint-James. They have agreed in choosing Monsieur de Saint-James to be arbitrator. In that the gentleman from the provinces has not shown much wisdom. What are people thinking of when they place a case in that man's hands? He is as gentle as a lamb and as shy as a girl. His eminence is most kind to him."

"What is it about?" said I.

"Three hundred thousand livres," said she.

"What! a lawyer?" I asked, with a little start of astonishment.

"Yes," replied she.

And, somewhat disturbed by having to make this humiliating confession, Madame Bodard returned to her game of faro.

Every table was made up. I had nothing to do or to say. I had just lost two thousand crowns to Monsieur de Laval, whom I had met in a courtesan's drawing-room. I went to take a seat in a deep chair near the fire. If ever on this earth there was an astonished man, it certainly was I on discovering that my opposite neighbor was the controller-general. Monsieur de Calonne seemed to be drowsy, or else he was absorbed in one of those brown studies which come over a statesman. When I pointed out the Minister to Beaumarchais, who came to speak to me, the creator of "Figaro" explained the mystery without speaking a word. He pointed first to my head and then to Bodard's in an ingeniously significant way, by directing his thumb to one and his little finger to the other, with the rest of the fingers closed. My first impulse was to go and say something sharp to Calonne, but I sat still; in the first place, because I intended to play the favorite trick, and also because Beaumarchais had somewhat familiarly seized my hand.

"What is it, monsieur?" said I.

With a wink he indicated the Minister.

"Do not wake him," he said in a low tone; "we may be only too thankful when he sleeps."

"But even sleeping is a scheme of finance," said I.

"Certainly it is," replied the statesmen, who had read our words by the mere motion of our lips. "And would to God we could sleep a long time; there would not be such an awakening as you will see!"

"Monseigneur," said the play-writer, "I owe you some thanks."

"What for?"

"Monsieur de Mirabeau is gone to Berlin. I do not know whether in this matter of the waters we may not both be drowned."

"You have too much memory and too little gratitude," replied the Minister drily, vexed at this betrayal of one of his secrets before me.

"Very possibly," said Beaumarchais, greatly nettled. "But I have certain millions which may square many accounts."

Calonne affected not to have heard.

It was half-past twelve before the card-tables broke up. Then we sat down to supper—ten of us: Bodard and his wife, the controller-general, Beaumarchais, the two strangers, two pretty women whose names may not be mentioned, and a farmer-general named, I think, Lavoisier. Of thirty persons whom I had found on entering the drawing-room but these ten remained. And the two "specimens" would only stay to supper on the pressing invitation of the lady of the house, who thought she could discharge her debt to one by giving him a meal, and asked the other perhaps to please her husband, to whom she was doing the civil—wherefore I know not. Monsieur de Calonne was a power, and if any one had cause to be annoyed it would have been I.

The supper was at first deadly dull. The two men and the farmer-general weighed on us. I signed to Beaumarchais to

make the son of Esculapius, by whom he was sitting, drink till he was tipsy, giving him to understand that I would deal with the lawyer. As this was the only kind of amusement open to us, and as it gave promise of some blundering impertinence on the part of the two strangers, which amused us by anticipation, Monsieur de Calonne smiled on the scheme. In two seconds the ladies had entered into our Bacchic plot. By significant glances they expressed their readiness to play their part, and the wine of Sillery crowned our glasses again and again with silvery foam. The surgeon was easy enough to deal with; but as I was about to pour out my neighbor's second glass, he told me with the cold politeness of a money-lender that he would drink no more.

At this time, by what chance I know not, Madame de Saint-James had turned the conversation on the wonderful suppers to the Comte de Cagliostro, given by the Cardinal de Rohan. My attention was not too keenly alive to what the mistress of the house was saying; for since her reply I had watched, with invincible curiosity, my neighbor's pinched, thin face, of which the principal feature was a nose at once wide and sharp, which made him at times look very much like a ferret. Suddenly his cheeks flushed as he heard Madame de Saint-James disputing with Monsieur de Calonne.

"But I assure you, monsieur," said she in a positive tone, "that I have seen Queen Cleopatra."

"I believe it, madame," said my neighbor. "I have spoken to Catherine de' Medici."

"Oh! oh!" said Monsieur de Calonne.

The words spoken by the little provincial had an indescribably sonorous tone—to use a word borrowed from physical science. This sudden clearness of enunciation, from a man who till now had spoken very little and very low, in the best possible taste, surprised us in the highest degree.

"Why, he is talking!" exclaimed the surgeon, whom Beaumarchais had worked up to a satisfactory condition.

"His neighbor must have touched a spring," replied the satirist.

Our man colored a little as he heard these words, though they were spoken in a murmur.

"And what was the late lamented Queen like?" asked Calonne.

"I will not assert that the person with whom I supped last night was Catherine de' Medici herself; such a miracle must seem as impossible to a Christian as to a philosopher," replied the lawyer, resting his finger-tips lightly on the table, and leaning back in his chair as if preparing to speak at some length. "But, at any rate, I can swear that that woman was as like to Catherine de' Medici as though they had been sisters. The lady I saw wore a black velvet dress, absolutely like that which the Queen is wearing in the portrait belonging to the King; on her head was the characteristic black velvet cap; her complexion was colorless, and her face the face you know. I could not help expressing my surprise to his eminence. The suddenness of the apparition was all the more wonderful because Monsieur le Comte de Cagliostro* could not guess the name of the personage in whose company I wished to be. I was utterly amazed. The magical spectacle of a supper where such illustrious women of the past were the guests robbed me of my presence of mind. When, at about midnight, I got away from this scene of witchcraft, I almost doubted my own identity.

"But all these marvels seemed quite natural by comparison with the strange hallucination under which I was presently to fall. I know not what words I can use to describe the condition of my senses. But I can declare, in all sincerity of heart, that I no longer wonder that there should have been, of old, spirits weak enough—or strong enough—to believe in the mysteries of magic and the power of the devil. For my part, till I have ampler information, I regard the apparitions of

* Joseph Balsamo, a sorcerer.

which Cardan and certain other thaumaturgists have spoken as quite possible."

These words, pronounced with incredible eloquence of tone, were of a nature to rouse extreme curiosity in those present. Our looks all centred on the orator, and we sat motionless. Our eyes alone showed life as they reflected the bright wax-lights in the candlesticks. By dint of watching the stranger we fancied we could see an emanation from the pores of his face, and especially from those of his brow, of the inner feelings that wholly possessed him. This man, apparently so cold and strictly reserved, seemed to have within him a hidden fire, of which the flame came forth to us.

"I know not," he went on, "whether the figure I had seen called up made itself invisible to follow me; but as soon as I had laid my head on my pillow, I saw the grand shade of Catherine rise before me. I instinctively felt myself in a luminous sphere; for my eyes, attracted to the Queen with painful fixity, saw her alone. Suddenly she bent over me——"

At these words the ladies with one consent betrayed keener curiosity.

"But," said the lawyer, "I do not know whether I ought to go on; although I am inclined to think that it was but a dream, what remains to be told is serious."

"Does it bear on religion?" asked Beaumarchais.

"Or is it in any way indecent?" asked Calonne. "These ladies will forgive it."

"It bears on government," replied the lawyer.

"Go on," said the Minister. "Voltaire, Diderot, and their like have done much to educate our ears."

The controller-general was all attention, and his neighbor, Madame de Genlis, became absorbed. The stranger still hesitated. Then Beaumarchais exclaimed impetuously—

"Come, proceed, master! Do you not know that when the laws leave folk so little liberty, people revenge themselves by laxity of manners?"

So the lawyer went on—

"Whether it was that certain ideas were fermenting in my soul or that I was prompted by some unknown power, I said to her—

"'Ah, madame, you committed a very great crime.'

"'Which?' she asked in a deep voice.

"'That for which the signal was given by the Palace clock on the 24th of August.'

"She smiled scornfully, and some deep furrows showed on her pallid cheeks.

"'Do you call that a crime?' replied she; 'it was only an accident. The undertaking was badly managed, and the good result we looked for failed—for France, for all Europe, and for the Catholic Church. How could we help it? Our orders were badly carried out. We could not find so many Montlucs as we needed. Posterity will not give us credit for the defective communications which hindered us from giving our work the unity of impulse which is necessary to any great *Coup d'État;* that was our misfortune. If by the 25th of August not the shadow of a Huguenot had been left in France, I should have been regarded to the remotest posterity as a noble incarnation of Providence. How often have the clear-seeing spirits of Sixtus V., of Richelieu, of Bossuet, secretly accused me of having failed in my undertaking, after daring to conceive of it! And how many regrets attended my death!

"'The disease was still rife thirty years after that Saint-Bartholomew's night; and it had caused the shedding of ten times more noble blood in France than was left to be shed on August 26, 1572. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, for which you had medals struck, cost more tears, more blood and money, and killed more prosperity in France than three Saint-Bartholomews. Letellier, with a dip of ink, carried into effect the decree which the Crown had secretly desired since my day; but though on August 25, 1572, this tremendous execution was necessary, on August 25, 1685, it was use-

less. Under Henri de Valois' second son heresy was scarcely pregnant; under Henri de Bourbon's second son the teeming mother had cast her spawn over the whole world.

"'You accuse me of crime and you raise statues to the son of Anne of Austria! But he and I aimed at the same end. He succeeded; I failed; but Louis XIV. found the Protestants disarmed, while in my day they had powerful armies, statesmen, captains, and Germany to back them.'

"On hearing these words slowly spoken, I felt within me a tremulous thrill. I seemed to scent the blood of I know not what victims. Catherine had grown before me. She stood there like an evil genius, and I felt as if she wanted to get into my conscience to find rest there——"

"He must have dreamed that," said Beaumarchais, in a low voice. "He certainly never invented it."

"'My reason is confounded,' said I to the Queen. 'You pride yourself on an action which three generations have condemned and held accursed, and——'

"'Add,' said she, 'that writers have been more unjust to me than my contemporaries were. No one undertakes my defense. I am accused of ambition—I who was so rich and a Queen. I am taxed with cruelty—I who have but two decapitations on my conscience. And to the most impartial minds I am still, no doubt, a great riddle. Do you really believe that I was governed by feelings of hatred, that I breathed only vengeance and fury?' She smiled scornfully. 'I was as calm and cold as Reason itself. I condemned the Huguenots without pity, but without anger; they were the rotten orange in my basket. If I had been Queen of England, I should have judged the Catholics in the same way, if they had been seditious. To give our power any vitality at that period, only one God could be allowed in the State, only one faith and one master. Happily for me, I left my excuse recorded in one sentence. When Birague brought me a false report of the loss of the battle of Dreux. "Well and good,"

said I, "then we will go to sermon." Hate the leaders of the New Religion? I esteemed them highly, and I did not know them. If I ever felt an aversion for any political personage, it was for that cowardly Cardinal de Lorraine, and for his brother, a wily and brutal soldier, who had me watched by their spies. They were my children's enemies; they wanted to snatch the crown from them; I saw them every day, and they were more than I could bear. If we had not carried out the plan for Saint-Bartholomew's Day, the Guises would have done it with the help of Rome and its monks. The League, which had no power till I had grown old, would have begun in 1573.'

"'But, madame,' said I, 'instead of commanding that horrible butchery—excuse my frankness—why did you not employ the vast resources of your political genius in giving the Reformers the wise institutions which made Henry IV.'s reign so glorious and peaceful?'

"She smiled again, shrugging her shoulders, and her hollow wrinkles gave her pale features an ironical expression full of bitterness.

"'After a furious struggle a nation needs repose,' said she. 'That is the secret of that reign. But Henri IV. committed two irremediable blunders: He ought neither to have abjured Protestantism nor to have left France Catholic after his own conversion. He alone has ever been in a position to change the face of France without a shock. Either not a single stole or not a single conventicle! That is what he ought to have seen. To leave two hostile principles at work in a government with nothing to balance them is a crime in a King; it is sowing the seed of revolutions. It belongs to God alone to leave good and evil for ever at odds in the work of His hand. But this sentence was, perhaps, inscribed at the foundations of Henri IV.'s policy, and, maybe, it was what led to his death. It is impossible that Sully should not have cast a covetous eye on the immense possessions of the clergy—though

the clergy were not their sole masters, for the nobles dissipated at least two-thirds of the church revenues. Sully the Reformer owned abbeys nevertheless.' She paused, to think, as it seemed.

"'But does it occur to you,' said she, 'that you are asking a Pope's niece her reason for remaining Catholic?' Again she paused. 'And, after all, I would just as soon have been a Calvinist,' she went on, with a gesture of indifference. 'Can the superior men of your age still think that religion had really anything to do with that great trial, the most tremendous of those that Europe has been required to decide—a vast revolution retarded by trivial causes, which will not hinder it from overflowing the whole world since I failed to stop it. A revolution,' said she, with a look of deep meaning, 'which is still progressing, and which you may achieve. Yes, *You*, who hear me!'

"I shuddered.

"'What! Has no one yet understood that old interests on one hand, and on the other new interests, had taken Rome and Luther to be their standards of battle! What! When Louis IX., to avoid a somewhat kindred struggle, dragged after him a population a hundred times greater than that I condemned to death, and left them in the sands of Egypt, he earned the title of saint, while I,' she added, 'failed.'

"She looked down and stood silent for a minute. It was no longer a Queen that I beheld, but rather one of those Druidesses of old who sacrificed men, and could unroll the pages of the future while exhuming the lore of the past. But she presently raised her royal and majestic face.

"'By directing the attention of the middle-classes to the abuses of the Roman Church,' said she, 'Luther and Calvin gave birth in Europe to a spirit of investigation which inevitably led the nations to examine everything. Examination leads to doubt. Instead of the faith indispensable to social existence, they brought in their train, and long after them, an

inquisitive philosophy, armed with hammers, and greedy of destruction. Science, with its false lights, sprang glittering from the womb of heresy. Reform in the church was not so much what was aimed at as the indefinite liberty of man, which is fatal to power. I have seen that. The result of the successes of the Reformers in their contest against the priesthood—even at that time better armed and more formidable than the Crown—was the destruction of the monarchical power raised with so much difficulty by Louis XI. on the ruins of feudality. Their aim was nothing less than the annihilation of religion and royalty, and over their wreck the middle-classes of all lands were to join in a common compact. Thus this contest was war to the death between these new allies and ancient laws and beliefs. The Catholics were the representative expression of the material interests of the Crown, the nobility, and the priesthood.

"'It was a duel to the death between two giants; the night of Saint-Bartholomew was, unfortunately, only a wound. Remember that, to save a few drops of blood at the right moment, a torrent had to be shed at a later day. There is a misfortune which the intelligence that looks down on a kingdom cannot avert: that, namely, of having no peers by whom to be judged when he succumbs under the burden of events. My peers are few; fools are in the majority; these two propositions account for everything. If my name is held in execration in France, the inferior minds which constitute the mass of every generation are to blame.

"'In such great crises as I have been through, reigning does not mean holding audience, reviewing troops, and signing decrees. I may have made mistakes; I was but a woman. But why was there no man then living who was superior to the age? The Duke of Alva had a soul of iron, Philip II. was stultified by Catholic dogmas, Henri IV. was a gambler and a libertine, the admiral was systematically pig-headed. Louis XI. had lived too soon; Richelieu came too late.

Whether it were virtuous or criminal, whether the Massacre of Saint-Bartholomew is attributed to me or not, I accept the burden. I shall always stand between those two great men as a visible link in an unrecognized chain. Some day paradoxical writers will wonder whether nations have not sometimes given the name of executioner to those who, in fact, were victims. Not once only will mankind be ready to immolate a God rather than accuse itself! You are all ready to shed tears for two hundred louts, when you refuse them for the woes of a generation, of a century, of the whole world! And you also forget that political liberty, the peace of a nation, and science itself are gifts for which Fate demands a heavy tax in blood!'

"'May the nations never be happy at less cost?' cried I, with tears in my eyes.

"'Great Truths leave their wells only to find fresh vigor in baths of blood. Christianity itself, the essence of all truth, since it proceeds from God, was not established without martyrs. Has not blood flowed in torrents? Must it not for ever flow? You will know—you who are to be one of the builders of the social edifice founded by the apostles. As long as you use your instruments to level heads, you will be applauded; then, when you want to take up the trowel, you will be killed.'

"'Blood! blood!'—the words rang in my brain like the echo of a bell.

"'According to you,' said I, 'Protestantism has the same right as you have to argue thus?'

"But Catherine had vanished as though some draught of air had extinguished the supernatural light which enabled my mind to see the figure which had grown to gigantic proportions. I had suddenly discerned in myself an element which assimilated the horrible doctrines set forth by the Italian Queen.

"I awoke in a sweat and in tears; and at the moment

when reason, triumphing within me, assured me in her mild tones that it was not the function of a King, nor even of a nation, to practice these principles, worthy only of a people of atheists——"

"And how are perishing monarchies to be saved?" asked Beaumarchais.

"God is above all, monsieur," replied my neighbor.

"Well, then," said Monsieur de Calonne, with the flippancy which characterized him, "we have always the resource of believing ourselves to be instruments in the hand of God, as the gospel according to Bossuet has it."

As soon as the ladies understood that the whole scene was a conversation between the Queen and the lawyer, they had begun whispering. Indeed, I have spared the reader the exclamations and interruptions with which they broke into the lawyer's narrative. However, such phrases as, "What a deadly bore!" and "My dear, when will he have done?" reached my ear.

When the stranger ceased speaking, the ladies were silent. Monsieur Bodard was asleep. The surgeon being half-drunk, Lavoisier, Beaumarchais, and I alone had been listening; Monsieur de Calonne was playing with the lady at his side.

At this moment the silence was almost solemn. The light of the tapers seemed to me to have a magical hue. A common sentiment linked us by mysterious bonds to this man who, to me, suggested the inexplicable effects of fanaticism. It needed nothing less than the deep hollow voice of Beaumarchais' neighbor to rouse us.

"I too dreamed!" he exclaimed.

I then looked more particularly at the surgeon and felt an indescribable sentiment of horror. His earthy complexion, his features, large but vulgar, were the exact expression of what I must be allowed to call *la canaille*, the rough mob. A few specks of dull blue and black dotted his skin like spots of mud, and his eyes flashed with sinister fires. The face

looked more ominous perhaps than it really was, because a powdered wig *à la frimas* (rimy or like hoar-frost) crowned his head with snow.

"That man must have buried more than one patient," said I to my neighbor.

"I would not trust my dog to his care," he replied.

"I hate him involuntarily," said I.

"I despise him," replied he.

"And yet how unjust!" cried I.

"Oh! bless me, by the day after to-morrow he may be as famous as Volange the actor," replied the stranger.

Monsieur de Calonne pointed to the surgeon with a gesture that seemed to convey, "This fellow might amuse us."

"And did you too dream of a queen?" asked Beaumarchais.

"No, I dreamed of a people," said he with emphasis, making us laugh. "I was attending a patient whose leg I was to amputate the next day——"

"And you found a people in your patient's thigh?" asked Monsieur de Calonne.

"Exactly so!" replied the surgeon.

"Is he not amusing?" cried Madame de Genlis.

"I was greatly surprised," the speaker went on, never heeding these interruptions, and stuffing his hands into his breeches pockets, "to find some one to talk to in that leg. I had the strange power of entering into my patient. When I first found myself in his skin, I discerned there an amazing number of tiny beings, moving, thinking, and arguing. Some lived in the man's body and some in his mind. His ideas were creatures that were born, grew, and died; they were sick, gay, healthy, sad—and all had personal individuality. They fought or fondled. A few ideas flew forth and went to dwell in the world of intellect. Suddenly I understood that there are two worlds—the visible and the invisible universe; that the earth, like man, has a body and a soul. A new light was cast on nature, and I perceived its immensity when I saw

the ocean of beings everywhere distributed in masses and in species, all of one and the same living matter, from marble rocks up to God. A magnificent sight! In short, there was a universe in my patient. When I inserted my lancet in his gangrened leg, I destroyed a thousand such beings. You laugh, ladies, at the idea that you are a prey to a thousand creatures——"

"No personalities," said Monsieur de Calonne, "speak for yourself and your patient."

"My man, horrified at the outcry of his animalcules, wanted to stop the operation; but I persisted, telling him that malignant creatures were already gnawing at his bones. He made a motion to resist me, not understanding that what I was doing was for his good, and my lancet pierced me in the side——"

"He is too stupid," said Lavoisier.

"No, he is drunk," replied Beaumarchais.

"But, gentlemen, my dream has a meaning," cried the surgeon.

"Oh, oh!" cried Bodard, waking, "my leg is asleep!"

"Your animalcules are dead," said his wife.

"That man has a vocation," put in my neighbor, who had imperturbably stared at the surgeon all the time he was talking.

"It is to monsieur's vocation what action is to speech or the body to the soul," said the ugly guest.

But his tongue was heavy, and he got confused; he could only utter unintelligible words. Happily, the conversation took another turn. By the end of half an hour we had forgotten the surgeon to the Court pages and he was asleep.

When we arose from table, the rain was to be seen pouring in torrents.

"The lawyer is no fool," said I to Beaumarchais.

"Oh, he is dull and cold. But you see the provinces can still produce good folk who take political theories and the

history of France quite seriously. It is a leaven that will spread."

"Have you a carriage?" Madame de Saint-James asked me.

"No," said I shortly. "I did not know that I should want it this evening. You thought, perhaps, that I should take home the controller-general? Did he come to your house *en polisson?*" (the fashionable name at the time for a person who drove his own carriage at Marly dressed as a coachman). Madame de Saint-James left me hastily, rang the bell, ordered her husband's carriage, and took the lawyer aside.

"Monsieur de Robespierre, will you do me the favor of seeing Monsieur Marat home, for he is incapable of standing upright?" said she.

"With pleasure, madame," replied Monsieur de Robespierre with an air of gallantry; "I wish you had ordered me to do something more difficult."

PARIS, *January*, 1828.

NOTE.

This is the song published by the Abbé de la Place in his collection of interesting fragments, in which may be found the dissertation alluded to. [It will be seen that it goes to the old tune of *Malbrouk s'en va-t-en guerre.*]

THE DUC DE GUISE'S BURIAL.

Qui veut ouïr chanson? (*Bis.*)
C'est du Grand Duc de Guise;
Et bon bon bon bon,
Di dan di dan don,
C'est du Grand Duc de Guise!

(This last line was spoken, no doubt, in a comic tone.)

Qui est mort et enterré.

Qui est mort et enterré. (*Bis.*)
Aux quatre coins du poêle,
Et bon bon bon bon,
Di dan di dan don,
Quatre gentilshomm's y avoit.

Quatre gentilshomm's y avoit. (*Bis.*)
L'un portoit son grand casque,
Et bon, etc.
Et l'autre ses pistolets.

Et l'autre ses pistolets, (*Bis.*)
Et l'autre son épée,
Et bon, etc.
Qui tant d'Hugu'nots a tués.

Qui tant d'Hugu'nots a tués. (*Bis.*)
Venoit le quatrième,
Et bon, etc.
Qui étoit le plus dolent.

Qui étoit le plus dolent; (*Bis.*)
Après venoient les pages,
Et bon, etc.
Et les valets de pied.

Et les valets de pied, (*Bis.*)
Avecque de grands crêpes,
Et bon, etc.
Et des souliers cirés.

Et des souliers cirés, (*Bis.*)
Et des beaux bas d'estame,
Et bon, etc.
Et des culottes de piau.

Et des culottes de piau. (*Bis.*)
La cérémonie faite,
Et bon, etc.
Chacun s'alla coucher.

Chacun s'alla coucher : (*Bis.*)
Les uns avec leurs femmes,
Et bon, etc.
Et les autres tout seuls.

The discovery of these curious verses seems to prove, to a certain extent, the guilt of Théodore de Bèze, who tried to mitigate the horror caused by this murder by turning it to ridicule. The principal merit of this song lay, it would appear, in the tune.

THE EXILES.

ALMAE SORORI.

In the year 1308 few houses were yet standing on the island formed by the alluvium and sand deposited by the Seine above the city, behind the church of Notre-Dame. The first man who was so bold as to build on this strand, then liable to frequent floods, was a constable of the watch of the City of Paris, who had been able to do some service to their reverences the chapter of the cathedral; and in return the bishop leased to him twenty-five perches of land, with exemption from all feudal dues or taxes on the buildings he might erect.

Seven years before the beginning of this narrative, Joseph Tirechair, one of the sternest of Paris constables, as his name [Tear Flesh] would indicate, had, thanks to his share of the fines collected by him for delinquencies committed within the precincts of the city, been able to build a house on the bank of the Seine just at the end of the Rue du Port-Saint-Landry. To protect the merchandise landed on the strand, the municipality had constructed a sort of breakwater of masonry, which may still be seen on some old plans of Paris, and which preserved the piles of the landing-place by meeting the rush of water and ice at the upper end of the island. The constable had taken advantage of this for the foundation of his house, so that there were several steps up to his door.

Like all the houses of that date, this cottage was crowned by a peaked roof, forming a gable-end to the front, of half a diamond. To the great regret of historians, but two or three examples of such roofs survive in Paris. A round opening gave light to a loft, where the constable's wife dried the linen of the chapter, for she had the honor of washing for the cathedral—which was certainly not a bad customer. On the second

floor were two rooms, let to lodgers at a rent, one year with another, of forty sous *Parisis** each, an exorbitant sum, that was however justified by the luxury Tirechair had lavished on their adornment. Flanders tapestry hung on the walls, and a large bed with a top valance of green serge, like a peasant's bed, was amply furnished with mattresses, and covered with good sheets of fine linen. Each room had a stove called a *chauffe-doux* (heat for one); the floor, carefully polished by Dame Tirechair's apprentices, shone like the woodwork of a shrine. Instead of stools, the lodgers had deep chairs of carved walnut, the spoils probably of some raided castle. Two chests with pewter mouldings, and tables on twisted legs, completed the fittings, worthy of the most fastidious knights-banneret whom business might bring to Paris.

The windows of those two rooms looked out on the river. From one you could only see the shores of the Seine and the three barren islands, of which two were subsequently joined together to form the Ile Saint-Louis; the third was the Ile de Louviers. From the other could be seen, down a vista of the Port-Saint-Landry, the buildings on the Grève, the bridge of Notre-Dame, with its houses, and the tall towers of the Louvre, but lately built by Philippe-Auguste to overlook the then poor and squalid town of Paris, which suggests so many imaginary marvels to the fancy of modern romancers.

The first floor of Tirechair's house consisted of a large hall, where his wife's business was carried on, through which the lodgers were obliged to pass on their way to their own rooms up a stairway like a mill-ladder. Behind this were a kitchen and a bedroom, with a view over the Seine. A tiny garden, reclaimed from the waters, displayed at the foot of this modest dwelling its beds of cabbages and onions, and a few rose-bushes, sheltered by palings, forming a sort of hedge. A little structure of lath and mud served as a kennel for a big dog, the indispensable guardian of so lonely a dwelling. Beyond this

* A small Paris coin, or token.

kennel was a little plot, where the hens cackled whose eggs were sold to the canons. Here and there on this patch of earth, muddy or dry according to the whimsical Parisian weather, a few trees grew, constantly lashed by the wind, and teased and broken by the passer-by—willows, reeds, and tall grasses.

The Eyot, the Seine, the landing-place, the house, were all overshadowed on the west by the huge basilica of Notre-Dame casting its cold gloom over the whole plot as the sun moved. Then, as now, there was not in all Paris a more deserted spot, a more solemn or more melancholy prospect. The noise of waters, the chanting of priests, or the piping of the wind were the only sounds that disturbed this wilderness, where lovers would sometimes meet to discuss their secrets when the church-folk and clergy were safe in church at the services.

One evening in April in the year 1308, Tirechair came home in a remarkably bad temper. For three days past everything had been in good order on the King's highway. Now, as an officer of the peace, nothing annoyed him so much as to feel himself useless. He flung down his halbert in a rage, muttered inarticulate words as he pulled off his doublet, half-red and half-blue, and slipped on a shabby camlet jerkin. After helping himself from the bread-box to a hunch of bread, and spreading it with butter, he seated himself on a bench, looked round at his four white-washed walls, counted the beams of the ceiling, made a mental inventory of the household goods hanging from the nails, scowled at the neatness which left him nothing to complain of, and looked at his wife, who said not a word as she ironed the albs and surplices from the sacristy.

"By my halidom," he said, to open the conversation, "I cannot think, Jacqueline, where you go to catch your apprenticed maids. Now, here is one," he went on, pointing to a girl who was folding an altar-cloth, clumsily enough, it must

be owned, "who looks to me more like a damsel rather free of her person than a sturdy, country wench. Her hands are as white as a fine lady's! By the mass! and her hair smells of essences, I verily believe, and her hose are as fine as a queen's. By the two horns of Old Nick, matters please me but ill as I find them here."

The girl colored, and stole a look at Jacqueline, full of alarm not unmixed with pride. The mistress answered her glance with a smile, laid down her work, and turned to her husband.

"Come now," said she, in a sharp tone, "you need not harry me. Are you going to accuse me next of some underhand tricks? Patrol your roads as much as you please, but do not meddle here with anything but what concerns your sleeping in peace, drinking your wine, and eating what I set before you, or else, I warn you, I will have no more to do with keeping you healthy and happy. Let any one find me a happier man in all the town," she went on, with a scolding grimace. "He has silver in his purse, a gable over the Seine, a stout halbert on one hand, an honest wife on the other, a house as clean and smart as a new pin! And he growls like a pilgrim smarting from Saint Anthony's fire!"

"Hey-day!" exclaimed the sergeant of the watch, "do you fancy, Jacqueline, that I have any wish to see my house razed down, my halbert given to another, and my wife standing in the pillory?"

Jacqueline and the dainty journeywoman turned pale.

"Just tell me what you are driving at," said the washerwoman sharply, "and make a clean breast of it. For some days, my man, I have observed that you have some maggot twisting in your poor brain. Come up, then, and have it all out. You must be a pretty coward indeed if you fear any harm when you have only to guard the common council and live under the protection of the chapter! Their reverences the canons would lay the whole bishopric under an

interdict if Jacqueline brought a complaint of the smallest damage."

As she spoke, she went straight up to her husband and took him by the arm.

"Come with me," she added, pulling him up and out on to the steps.

When they were down by the water in their little garden, Jacqueline looked saucily in her husband's face.

"I would have you to know, you old gaby, that when my lady fair goes out, a piece of gold comes into our savings-box."

"Oh, ho!" said the constable, who stood silent and meditative before his wife. But he presently said, "Any way, we are done for. What brings the dame to our house?"

"She comes to see the well-favored young clerk who lives overhead," replied Jacqueline, looking up at the window that opened on to the vast landscape of the Seine valley.

"The devil's in it!" cried the man. "For a few base crowns you have ruined me, Jacqueline. Is that an honest trade for a sergeant's decent wife to ply? And, be she Countess or Baroness, the lady will not be able to get us out of the trap in which we shall find ourselves caught sooner or later. Shall we not have to square accounts with some puissant and offended husband? for, by the mass, she is fair to look upon!"

"But she is a widow, I tell you, gray gander! How dare you accuse your wife of foul play and folly? And the lady has never spoken a word to yon gentle clerk; she is content to look on him and think of him. Poor lad! he would be dead of starvation by now but for her, for she is as good as a mother to him. And he, the sweet cherub! it is as easy to cheat him as to rock a new-born babe. He believes his pence will last for ever, and he has eaten them through twice over in the past six months."

"Woman," said the sergeant, solemnly pointing to the Place de Grève, "do you remember seeing, even from this

spot, the fire in which they burnt the Danish woman the other day?"

"When then?" said Jacqueline, in a fright.

"What then?" echoed Tirechair. "Why, the two men who lodge with us smell of scorching, and neither chapter nor Countess nor protector can serve them. Here is Easter come around; the year is ending; we must turn our company out of doors, and that at once. Do you think you can teach an old constable how to know a gallows-bird? Our two lodgers were on terms with la Porette, that heretic jade from Denmark or Norway, whose last cries you heard from here. She was a brave witch; she never blenched at the stake, which was proof enough of her compact with the devil. I saw her as plain as I see you; she preached to the throng, and declared she was in heaven and could see God.

"And since that, I tell you, I have never slept quietly in my bed. My lord, who lodges over us, is of a surety more of a wizard than a Christian. On my word as an officer, I shiver when that old man passes near me; he never sleeps of nights; if I wake, his voice is ringing like a bourdon of bells, and I hear him uttering incantations in the language of hell. Have you ever seen him eat an honest crust of bread or a hearth-cake made by a good Catholic baker? His brown skin has been scorched and tanned by hell-fires. Marry, and I tell you his eyes hold a spell like those of serpents. Jacqueline, I will have none of those two men under my roof. I see too much of the law not to know that it is well to have nothing to do with it. You must get rid of our two lodgers; the elder, because I suspect him; the youngster, because he is too pretty. They neither of them seem to me to keep Christian company. The boy is ever staring at the moon, the stars, and the clouds, like a wizard watching for the hour when he shall mount his broomstick; the other old rogue certainly makes some use of the poor boy for his black art. My house stands too close to the river as it is, and that risk of ruin is

bad enough without bringing down fire from heaven, or the love affairs of a countess. I have spoken. Do not rebel."

In spite of her sway in the house, Jacqueline stood stupefied as she listened to the edict fulminated against his lodgers by the sergeant of the watch. She mechanically looked up at the window of the room inhabited by the old man, and shivered with horror as she suddenly caught sight of the gloomy, melancholy face, and the piercing eye that so affected her husband, accustomed as he was to dealing with criminals.

At that period, great and small, priests and laymen, all trembled before the idea of any supernatural power. The word "magic" was as powerful as leprosy to root up feelings, break social ties, and freeze pity in the most generous soul. It suddenly struck the constable's wife that she never, in fact, had seen either of her lodgers exercising any human function. Though the younger man's voice was as sweet and melodious as the tones of a flute, she so rarely heard it that she was tempted to think his silence the result of a spell. As she recalled the strange beauty of that pink-and-white face, and saw in memory the fine fair hair and moist brilliancy of those eyes, she believed they were indeed the artifices of the devil. She remembered that for days at a time she had never heard the slightest sound from either room. Where were the strangers during all those hours?

Suddenly the most singular circumstances recurred to her mind. She was completely overmastered by fear, and could even discern witchcraft in the rich lady's interest in this young Godefroid, a poor orphan who had come from Flanders to study at the University of Paris. She hastily put her hand into one of her pockets, pulled out four livres of Tournay in large silver coinage, and looked at the pieces with an expression of avarice mingled with terror.

"That, at any rate, is not false coin," said she, showing the silver to her husband. "Beside," she went on, "how

can I turn them out after taking next year's rent paid in advance?"

"You had better inquire of the dean of the chapter," replied Tirechair. "Is it not his business to tell us how we should deal with these extraordinary persons?"

"Ay, truly extraordinary," cried Jacqueline. "To think of their cunning; coming here under the very shadow of Notre-Dame! Still," she went on, "or ever I ask the dean, why not warn that fair and noble lady of the risk she runs?"

As she spoke, Jacqueline went into the house with her husband, who had not missed a mouthful. Tirechair, as a man grown old in the tricks of his trade, affected to believe that the strange lady was in fact a work-girl; still, this assumed indifference could not altogether cloak the timidity of a courtier who respects a royal incognito. At this moment six was striking by the clock of Saint-Denis du Pas, a small church that stood between Notre-Dame and the Port-Saint-Landry—the first church erected in Paris, on the very spot where Saint-Denis was laid on the gridiron, as chronicles tell. The hour flew from steeple to tower all over the city. Then suddenly confused shouts were heard on the left bank of the Seine, behind Notre-Dame, in the quarter where the schools of the University harbored their swarms.

At this signal, Jacqueline's elder lodger began to move about his room. The sergeant, his wife, and the strange lady listened while he opened and shut his door, and the old man's heavy step was heard on the steep stair. The constable's suspicions gave such interest to the advent of this personage that the lady was startled as she observed the strange expression of the two countenances before her. Referring the terrors of this couple to the youth she was protecting—as was natural in a lover—the young lady awaited, with some uneasiness, the event thus heralded by the fears of her so-called master and mistress.

The old man paused for a moment on the threshold to scrutinize the three persons in the room, and seemed to be looking for his young companion. This glance of inquiry, unsuspicious as it was, agitated the three. Indeed, nobody, not even the stoutest man, could deny that nature had bestowed exceptional powers on this being, who seemed almost supernatural. Though his eyes were somewhat deeply shaded by the wide sockets fringed with long eyebrows, they were set, like a kite's eyes, in eyelids so broad, and bordered by so dark a circle sharply defined on his cheek, that they seemed rather to be prominent. These singular eyes had in them something indescribably domineering and piercing, which took possession of the soul by a grave and thoughtful look, a look as bright and lucid as that of a serpent or a bird, but which held one fascinated and crushed by the swift communication of some tremendous sorrow, or of some superhuman power.

Every feature was in harmony with this eye of lead and of fire, at once rigid and flashing, stern and calm. While in this eagle eye earthly emotions seemed in some sort extinct, the lean, parched face also bore traces of unhappy passions and great deeds done. The nose, which was narrow and aquiline, was so long that it seemed to hang on by the nostrils. The bones of the face were strongly marked by the long, straight wrinkles that furrowed the hollow cheeks. Every line in the countenance looked dark. It would suggest the bed of a torrent where the violence of former floods was recorded in the depth of the water-courses, which testified to some terrible, unceasing turmoil. Like the ripples left by the oars of a boat on the waters, deep lines, starting from each side of his nose, marked his face strongly, and gave an expression of bitter sadness to his mouth, which was firm and straight-lipped. Above the storm thus stamped on his countenance, his calm brow rose with what may be called boldness, and crowned it as with a marble dome.

The stranger preserved that intrepid and dignified manner that is frequently habitual with men inured to disaster, and fitted by nature to stand unmoved before a furious mob and to face the greatest dangers. He seemed to move in a sphere apart, where he poised above humanity. His gestures, no less than his look, were full of irresistible power; his lean hands were those of a soldier; and if your own eyes were forced to fall before his piercing gaze, you were no less sure to tremble when by word or action he spoke to your soul. He moved in silent majesty that made him seem a king without his guard, a god without his rays.

His dress emphasized the ideas suggested by the peculiarities of his mien and face. Soul, body, and garb were in harmony, and calculated to impress the coldest imagination. He wore a sort of sleeveless gown of black cloth, fastened in front, and falling to the calf, leaving the neck bare with no collar. His doublet and boots were likewise black. On his head was a black velvet cap like a priest's, sitting in a close circle above his forehead, and not showing a single hair. It was the strictest mourning, the gloomiest habit a man could wear. But for a long sword that hung by his side from a leather belt which could be seen where his surcoat hung open, a priest would have hailed him as a brother. Though of no more than middle height, he appeared tall; and, looking him in the face, he seemed a giant.

"The clock has struck, the boat is waiting; will you not come?"

At these words, spoken in bad French, but distinctly audible in the silence, a little noise was heard in the other top room, and the young man came down as lightly as a bird.

When Godefroid appeared the lady's face turned crimson; she trembled, started, and covered her face with her white hands.

Any woman might have shared her agitation at the sight of

this youth of about twenty, of a form and stature so slender that at a first glance he might have been taken for a mere boy, or a young girl in disguise. His black cap—like the *beret* worn by the Basque people—showed a brow as white as snow, where grace and innocence shone with an expression of divine sweetness—the light of a soul full of faith. A poet's fancy would have seen there the star which, in some old tale, a mother entreats the fairy godmother to set on the forehead of an infant abandoned, like Moses, to the waves. Love lurked in the thousand fair curls that fell over his shoulders. His throat, truly a swan's throat, was white and exquisitely round. His blue eyes, bright and liquid, mirrored the sky. His features and the mould of his brow were refined and delicate enough to enchant a painter. The bloom of beauty, which in a woman's face causes men such indescribable delight, the exquisite purity of outline, the halo of light that bathes the features we love, were here combined with a masculine complexion, and with strength as yet but half developed, in the most enchanting contrast. His was one of those melodious countenances which, even when silent, speak and attract us. And yet, on marking it attentively, the incipient blight might have been detected which comes of a great thought or a passion, the faint yellow tinge that made him seem like a young leaf opening to the sun.

No contrast could be greater or more startling than that seen in the companionship of these two men. It was like seeing a frail and graceful shrub that has grown from the hollow trunk of some gnarled willow, withered by age, blasted by lightning, standing decrepit; one of those majestic trees that painters love; the trembling sapling takes shelter there from storms. One was a god, the other was an angel; one the poet that feels, the other the poet that expresses—a prophet in sorrow, a Levite in prayer.

They went out together without speaking.

"Did you mark how he called him to him?" cried the

sergeant of the watch when the footsteps of the couple were no longer audible on the strand. "Are they not a demon and his familiar?"

"Phooh!" puffed Jacqueline. "I felt smothered! I never marked our two lodgers so carefully. 'Tis a bad thing for us women that the devil can wear so fair a mien!"

"Ay, cast some holy water on him," said Tirechair, "and you will see him turn into a toad. I am off to tell the office all about them."

On hearing this speech the lady roused herself from the reverie into which she had sunk and looked at the constable, who was donning his red-and-blue jacket.

"Whither are you off?" she asked.

"To tell the justices that wizards are lodging in our house very much against our will."

The lady smiled.

"I," said she, "am the Comtesse de Mahaut," and she rose with a dignity that took the man's breath away. "Beware of bringing the smallest trouble on your guests. Above all, respect the old man; I have seen him in the company of your lord the King, who entreated him courteously; you will be ill-advised to trouble him in any way. As to my having been here—never breathe a word of it, as you value your life."

She said no more, but relapsed into thought.

Presently she looked up, signed to Jacqueline, and together they went up into Godefroid's room. The fair Countess looked at the bed, the carved chairs, the chest, the tapestry, the table, with a joy like that of the exile who sees on his return the crowded roofs of his native town nestling at the foot of a hill.

"If you have not deceived me," said she to Jacqueline, "I promise you a hundred crowns in gold."

"Behold, madame," said the woman, "the poor angel is confiding—here is all his treasure."

As she spoke, Jacqueline opened a drawer in the table and showed some parchments.

"God of mercy!" cried the Countess, snatching up a document that caught her eye, on which she read, *Gothofredus Comes Gantiacus* (Godefroid, Count of Ghent).

She dropped the parchment, and passed her hand over her brow; then, feeling, no doubt, that she had compromised herself by showing so much emotion, she recovered her cold demeanor.

"I am satisfied," said she.

She went downstairs and out of the house. The constable and his wife stood in their doorway, and saw her take the path to the landing-place.

A boat was moored hard by. When the rustle of the Countess' approach was audible, a boatman suddenly stood up, helped the fair laundress to take her seat in it, and rowed with such strength as to make the boat fly like a swallow down the stream.

"You are a sorry fellow," said Jacqueline, giving the officer's shoulder a familiar slap. "We have earned a hundred gold crowns this morning."

"I like harboring lords no better than harboring wizards. And I know not, of the two, which is the more like to bring us to the gallows," replied Tirechair, taking up his halbert. "I will go my rounds over by Champfleuri; God protect us, and send me to meet some pert jade out in her bravery of gold rings to glitter in the shade like a glow-worm!"

Jacqueline, alone in the house, hastily went up to the unknown lord's room to discover, if she could, some clue to this mysterious business. Like some learned men who give themselves infinite pains to complicate the clear and simple laws of nature, she had already invented a chaotic romance to account for the meeting of these three persons under her humble roof. She hunted through the chest, examined everything, but could find nothing extraordinary. She saw nothing

on the table but a writing-case and some sheets of parchment; and as she could not read, this discovery told her nothing. A woman's instinct then took her into the young man's room, and from thence she descried her two lodgers crossing the river in the ferry-boat.

"They stand like two statues," said she to herself. "Ah, ha! They are landing at the Rue du Fouarre. How nimble he is, the sweet youth! He jumped out like a bird. By him the old man looks like some stone saint in the cathedral. They are going to the old school of the Four Nations. Presto! they are out of sight. And this is where he lives, poor cherub!" she went on, looking about the room. "How smart and winning he is! Ah! your fine gentry are made of other stuff than we are."

And Jacqueline went down again after smoothing the bed-coverlet, dusting the chest, and wondering for the hundredth time in six months—

"What in the world does he do all the blessed day? He cannot always be staring at the blue sky and the stars that God has hung up there like lanterns. That dear boy has known trouble. But why do he and the old man hardly ever speak to each other?"

Then she lost herself in wonderment and in thoughts which, in her addled woman's brain, were tangled like a skein of silken thread.

The old man and his young companion had gone into one of the schools for which the Rue du Fouarre was at that time famous throughout Europe. At the moment when Jacqueline's two lodgers arrived at the old school des Quatre Nations, the celebrated Sigier, the most noted Doctor of Mystical Theology of the University of Paris, was mounting his pulpit in a spacious, low room on a level with the street. The cold stones were strewn with clean straw, on which several of his disciples knelt on one knee, writing on the other, to enable them to take notes from the Master's improvised discourse, in

the shorthand abbreviations which are the despair of modern decipherers.

The hall was full, not of students only, but of the most distinguished men belonging to the clergy, the Court, and the legal faculty. There were some learned foreigners, too—soldiers and rich citizens. The broad faces were there, with prominent brows and venerable beards, which fill us with a sort of pious respect for our ancestors when we see their portraits from the Middle Ages. Lean faces, too, with burning, sunken eyes, under bald heads yellow from the labors of futile scholasticism, contrasted with young and eager countenances, grave faces, warlike faces, and the ruddy cheeks of the financial class.

These lectures, dissertations, theses, sustained by the brightest geniuses of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, roused our forefathers to enthusiasm. They were to them their bull-fights, their Italian opera, their tragedy, their dancers; in short, all their drama. The performance of Mysteries* was a later thing than these spiritual disputations, to which, perhaps, we owe the French stage. Inspired eloquence, combining the attractions of the human voice skillfully used, with daring inquisition into the secrets of God, sufficed to satisfy every form of curiosity, appealed to the soul, and constituted the fashionable entertainment of the time. Not only did theology include the other sciences, it was science itself, as grammar was science to the ancient Greeks; and those who distinguished themselves in these duels, in which the orators, like Jacob, wrestled with the Spirit of God, had a promising future before them. Embassies, arbitrations between sovereigns, chancellorships, and ecclesiastical dignities were the meed of men whose rhetoric had been schooled in theological controversy. The professor's chair was the tribune of the period.

This system lasted till the day when Rabelais gibbeted

* A rude drama: The passion play, at Ober-Ammergau, is a survival.

dialectics by his merciless satire, as Cervantes demolished chivalry by a narrative-comedy.

To understand this amazing period and the spirit which dictated its voluminous, though now forgotten, masterpieces, to analyze it, even to its barbarisms, we need only examine the constitutions of the University of Paris and the extraordinary scheme of instruction that then obtained. Theology was taught under two faculties—that of Theology properly so called, and that of Canon Law. The faculty of Theology, again, had three sections—Scholastic, Canonical, and Mystic. It would be wearisome to give an account of the attributes of each section of the science, since one only, namely, Mystic, is the subject of this *Étude* (study).

Mystical Theology included the whole of Divine Revelation and the elucidation of the Mysteries. And this branch of ancient theology has been secretly preserved with reverence even to our own day; Jacob Bœhm, Swedenborg, Martinez Pasqualis, Saint-Martin, Molinos, Madame Guyon, Madame Bourignon, and Madame Krudener, the extensive sect of the Ecstatics, and that of the Illuminati, have at different periods duly treasured the doctrines of this science, of which the aim is indeed truly startling and portentous. In Doctor Sigier's day, as in our own, man has striven to gain wings to fly into the sanctuary where God hides from our gaze.

This digression was necessary to give a clue to the scene at which the old man and the youth from the island under Notre-Dame had come to be audience; it will also protect this narrative from all blame on the score of falsehood and hyperbole, of which certain persons of hasty judgment might perhaps suspect me.

Doctor Sigier was a tall man in the prime of life. His face, rescued from oblivion by the archives of the University, had singular analogies with that of Mirabeau. It was stamped with the seal of fierce, swift, and terrible eloquence. But the doctor bore on his brow the expression of religious faith that

his modern double had not. His voice, too, was of persuasive sweetness, with a clear and pleasing ring in it.

At this moment the daylight, that was stintingly diffused through the small, heavily-leaded window-panes, tinted the assembly with capricious tones and powerful contrasts from the checkered light and shade. Here, in a dark corner, eyes shone brightly, their dark heads under the sunbeams gleamed light above faces in shadow, and various bald heads, with only a circlet of white hair, were distinguished among the crowd like battlements silvered by moonlight. Every face was turned toward the doctor, mute but impatient. The drowsy voices of other lecturers in the adjoining schools were audible in the silent street like the murmuring of the sea; and the steps of the two strangers, as they now came in, attracted general attention. Doctor Sigier, ready to begin, saw the stately senior standing, looked round for a seat for him, and then finding none, as the place was full, came down from his place, went to the new-comer, and, with great respect, led him to the platform of his professor's chair, and there gave him his stool to sit upon. The assembly hailed this mark of deference with a murmur of approval, recognizing the old man as the orator of a fine thesis admirably argued not long since at the Sorbonne.

The stranger looked down from his raised position on the crowd below with that deep glance that held a whole poem of sorrow, and those who met his eyes felt an indescribable thrill. The lad, following the old man, sat down on one of the steps, leaning against the pulpit in a graceful and melancholy attitude. The silence was now profound, and the doorway and even the street were blocked by scholars who had deserted the other classes.

Doctor Sigier was to-day to recapitulate, in the last of a series of discourses, the views he had set forth in the former lectures on the Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell. His strange doctrine responded to the sympathies of the time, and grati-

fied the immoderate love of the marvelous, which haunts the mind of man in every age. This effort of man to clutch the infinite, which for ever slips through his ineffectual grasp, this last tourney of thought against thought was a task worthy of an assembly where the brightest luminaries of the age had met, and where the most stupendous human imagination ever known, perhaps, at that moment shone.

The doctor began by summing up in a mild and even tone the principal points he had so far established:

"No intellect was the exact counterpart of another. Had man any right to require an account of his Creator for the inequality of powers bestowed on each? Without attempting to penetrate rashly into the designs of God, ought we not to recognize the fact that by reason of their general diversity intelligences could be classed in spheres? From the sphere where the least degree of intelligence gleamed, to the most translucent souls who could see the road by which to ascend to God, was there not an ascending scale of spiritual gift? And did not spirits of the same sphere understand each other like brothers in soul, in flesh, in mind, and in feeling?"

From this the doctor went on to unfold the most wonderful theories of sympathy. He set forth in Biblical language the phenomena of love, of instinctive repulsion, of strong affinities which transcend the laws of space, of the sudden mingling of souls which seem to recognize each other. With regard to the different degrees of strength of which our affections are capable, he accounted for them by the place, more or less near the centre, occupied by beings in their respective circles.

He gave mathematical expression to God's grand idea in the coördination of the various human spheres. "Through man," he said, "these spheres constituted a world intermediate between the intelligence of the brute and the intelli-

gence of the angels." As he stated it, the divine Word nourishes the spiritual Word, the spiritual Word nourishes the living Word, the living Word nourishes the animal Word, the animal Word nourishes the vegetable Word, and the vegetable Word is the expression of the life of the barren Word. These successive evolutions, as of a chrysalis, which God thus wrought in our souls, this infusorial life, so to speak, communicated from each zone to the next, more vivid, more spiritual, more perceptive in its ascent, represented, rather dimly no doubt, but marvelously enough to his inexperienced hearers, the impulse given to nature by the Almighty. Supported by many texts from the Sacred Scriptures, which he used as a commentary on his own statements to express by concrete images the abstract arguments he felt to be wanting, he flourished the Spirit of God like a torch over the deep secrets of creation, with an eloquence peculiar to himself, and accents that urged conviction on his audience. As he unfolded his mysterious system and all its consequences, he gave a key to every symbol and justified the vocation, the special gifts, the genius, the talent of each human being.

Then, instinctively becoming physiological, he remarked on the resemblance to certain animals stamped on some human faces, accounting for them by primordial analogies and the upward tendency of all creation. He showed his audience the workings of nature, and assigned a mission and a future to minerals, plants, and animals. Bible in hand, after thus spiritualizing Matter and materializing Spirit, after pointing to the Will of God in all things, and enjoining respect for His smallest works, he suggested the possibility of rising by faith from sphere to sphere.

This was the first portion of his discourse, and, by adroit digressions, he applied the doctrine of his system to feudalism. The poetry—religious and profane—and the abrupt eloquence of that period had a grand opening in this vast theory, wherein the doctor had amalgamated all the philosophical systems of

the ancients, and from which he brought them out again classified, transfigured, purified. The false dogmas of two adverse principles and of Pantheism were demolished at his word, which proclaimed the Divine Unity, while ascribing to God and His angels the knowledge, the ends to which the means shone resplendent to the eyes of man. Fortified by the demonstrations that proved the existence of the world of Matter, Doctor Sigier constructed the scheme of a spiritual world dividing us from God by an ascending scale of spheres, just as the plant is divided from man by an infinite number of grades. He peopled the heavens, the stars, the planets, the sun.

Quoting Saint Paul, he invested man with a new power; he might rise, from globe to globe, to the very Font of eternal life. Jacob's mystical ladder was both the religious formula and the traditional proof of the fact. He soared through space, carrying with him the passionate souls of his hearers on the wings of his word, making them feel the infinite, and bathing them in the heavenly sea. Then the doctor accounted logically for hell by circles placed in inverse order to the shining spheres that lead to God, in which torments and darkness take the place of the Spirit and of light. Pain was as intelligible as rapture. The terms of the comparison were present in the conditions of human life and its various atmospheres of suffering and of intellect. Thus the most extraordinary traditions of hell and purgatory were quite naturally conceivable.

He gave the fundamental *rationale* of virtue with admirable clearness. A pious man, toiling onward in poverty, proud of his good conscience, at peace with himself, and steadfastly true to himself in his heart in spite of the spectacle of exultant vice, was a fallen angel doing penance, who remembered his origin, foresaw his guerdon, accomplished his task, and obeyed his glorious mission. The sublime resignation of Christians was then seen in all its glory. He depicted martyrs at the

burning stake, and almost stripped them of their merit by stripping them of their sufferings. He showed their inner angel as dwelling in the heavens, while the outer man was tortured by the executioner's sword. He described angels dwelling among men, and gave tokens by which to recognize them.

He next strove to drag from the very depths of man's understanding the real sense of the word fall, which occurs in every language. He appealed to the most widely spread traditions in evidence of this one true origin, explaining, with much lucidity, the passion all men have for rising, mounting—an instinctive ambition, the perennial revelation of our destiny.

He displayed the whole universe at a glance, and described the nature of God Himself circulating in a full tide from the centre to the extremities, and from the extremities to the centre again. Nature was one and homogeneous. In the most seemingly trivial, as in the most stupendous work, everything obeyed that law; each created object reproduced in little an exact image of that nature—the sap in the plant, the blood in man, the orbits of the planets. He piled proof on proof, always completing his idea by a picture musical with poetry.

And he boldly anticipated every objection. He thundered forth an eloquent challenge to the monumental works of science and human excrescences of knowledge, such as those which societies use the elements of the earthly globe to produce. He asked whether our wars, our disasters, our depravity could hinder the great movement given by God to all the globes; and he laughed human impotence to scorn by pointing to their efforts everywhere in ruins. He cried upon the names of Tyre, Carthage, and Babylon; he called upon Babel and Jerusalem to appear; and sought, without finding them, the transient furrows made by the ploughshare of civilization. Humanity floated on the surface of the earth as a ship whose wake is lost on the calm level of ocean.

These were the fundamental notions set forth in Doctor Sigier's address, all wrapped in the mystical language and strange school-Latin of the time. He had made a special study of the Scriptures, and they supplied him with the weapons with which he came before his contemporaries to hasten their progress. He hid his boldness under his immense learning, as with a cloak, and his philosophical bent under a saintly life. At this moment, after bringing his hearers face to face with God, after packing the universe into an idea, and almost unveiling the idea of the world, he gazed down on the silent, throbbing mass, and scrutinized the stranger with a look. Then, spurred on, no doubt, by the presence of this remarkable personage, he added these words, from which I have eliminated the corrupt Latinity of the Middle Ages:

"Where, think you, may a man find these fruitful truths if not in the heart of God Himself? What am I? The humble interpreter of a single line left to us by the greatest of the Apostles—a single line out of thousands all equally full of light. Before us, Saint Paul said, '*In Deo vivimus movemur et sumus.*' In our day less believing and more learned, or better instructed and more skeptical, we should ask the Apostle, 'To what end this perpetual motion? Whither leads this life divided into zones? Wherefore an intelligence that begins with the obscure perfection of marble and proceeds from sphere to sphere up to man, up to the angel, up to God? Where is the Font, where is the ocean, if life, attaining to God across worlds and stars, through Matter and Spirit, has to come down again to some other goal?'

"You desire to see both aspects of the universe at once. You would adore the Sovereign on condition of being suffered to sit for an instant on His throne. Mad fools that we are! We will not admit that the most intelligent animals are able to understand our ideas and the object of our actions; we are merciless to the creatures of the inferior spheres, and exile them from our own; we deny them the faculty of divin-

ing human thoughts, and yet we ourselves would fain master the highest of all ideas—the Idea of the Idea!

"Well, go then, start! Fly by faith up from globe to globe, soar through space! Thought, love, and faith are its mystical keys. Traverse the circles, reach the throne! God is more merciful than you are; He opens His Temple to all His creatures. Only, do not forget the pattern of Moses: put your shoes from off your feet, cast off all filth, leave your body far behind; otherwise you shall be consumed; for God —God is Light!"

Just as Doctor Sigier spoke these grand words, his face radiant, his hand uplifted, a sunbeam pierced through an open window, like a magic jet from a font of splendor, a long triangular shaft of gold that lay like a scarf over the whole assembly. They all clapped their hands, for the audience accepted this effect of the sinking sun as a miracle. There was a universal cry of—

"*Vivat! Vivat!*" (Bravo! Bravo!)

The very sky seemed to shed approval. Godefroid, struck with reverence, looked from the old man to Doctor Sigier; they were talking together in an undertone.

"All honor to the master!" said the stranger.

"What is such transient honor?" replied Sigier.

"I would I could perpetuate my gratitude," said the older man.

"A line written by you is enough!" said the doctor "It would give me immortality, humanly speaking."

"Can I give what I have not?" cried the elder.

Escorted by the crowd, which followed in their footsteps, like courtiers around a king, at a respectful distance, Godefroid, with the old man and the doctor, made their way to the oozy shore, where as yet there were no houses, and where the ferryman was waiting for them. The doctor and the stranger were talking together, not in Latin nor in any Gallic tongue, but in an unknown language, and very gravely. They

pointed with their hands now to heaven and now to the earth. Sigier, to whom the paths by the river were familiar, guided the venerable stranger with particular care to the narrow planks which here and there bridged the mud; the following watched them inquisitively; and some of the students envied the privileged boy who might walk with these two great masters of speech. Finally, the doctor took leave of the stranger, and the ferry-boat pushed off.

At the moment when the boat was afloat on the wide river, communicating its motion to the soul, the sun pierced the clouds like a conflagration blazing up on the horizon, and poured forth a flood of light, coloring slate roof-tops and humbler thatch with a ruddy glow and tawny reflections, fringed Philippe Auguste's towers with fire, flooded the sky, dyed the waters, gilded the plants, and aroused the half-sleeping insects. The immense shaft of light set the clouds on fire. It was like the last verse of the daily hymn. Every heart was thrilled; nature in such a moment is sublime.

As he gazed at the spectacle, the stranger's eyes moistened with the tenderest of human tears: Godefroid, too, was weeping; his trembling hand touched that of the elder man, who, looking round, confessed his emotion. But thinking his dignity as a man compromised, no doubt, to redeem it, he said in a deep voice—

"I weep for my native land. I am an exile! Young man, in such an hour as this I left my home. There, at this hour, the fireflies are coming out of their fragile dwellings and clinging like diamond sparks to the leaves of the iris. At this hour the breeze, as sweet as the sweetest poetry, rises up from a valley bathed in light, bearing on its wings the richest fragrance. On the horizon I could see a golden city like the heavenly Jerusalem—a city whose name I may not speak. There, too, a river winds. But that city and its buildings, that river of which the lovely vistas, and the pools of blue water, mingled, crossed, and embraced each other, which

gladdened my sight and filled me with love—where are they?

"At that hour the waters assumed fantastic hues under the sunset sky, and seemed to be painted pictures; the stars dropped tender streaks of light, the moon spread its pleasing snares; it gave another life to the trees, to the color and form of things, and a new aspect to the sparkling water, the silent hills, the eloquent buildings. The city spoke, it glittered, it called to me to return!

"Columns of smoke rose up by the side of the ancient pillars, whose marble sheen gleamed white through the night; the lines of the horizon were still visible through the mists of evening; all was harmony and mystery. Nature would not say farewell; she desired to keep me there. Ah! It was all in all to me; my mother and my child, my wife and my glory! The very bells bewailed my condemnation. Oh, land of marvels! It is as beautiful as heaven. From that hour the wide world has been my dungeon. Beloved land, why hast thou rejected me?

"But I shall triumph there yet!" he cried, speaking with an accent of such intense conviction and such a ringing tone, that the boatman started as at a trumpet call.

The stranger was standing in a prophetic attitude and gazing southward into the blue, pointing to his native home across the skyey regions. The ascetic pallor of his face had given place to a glow of triumph, his eyes flashed, he was as grand as a lion shaking his mane.

"But you, poor child," he went on, looking at Godefroid, whose cheeks were beaded with glittering tears, "have you, like me, studied life from blood-stained pages? What can you have to weep for, at your age?"

"Alas!" said Godefroid, "I regret a land more beautiful than any land on earth—a land I never saw and yet remember. Oh, if I could but cleave the air on beating wings, I would fly——"

"Whither?" asked the exile.

"Up there," replied the boy.

On hearing this answer, the stranger seemed surprised; he looked darkly at the youth, who remained silent. They seemed to communicate by an unspeakable effusion of the spirit, hearing each other's yearnings in the teeming silence, and going forth side by side, like two doves sweeping the air on equal wing, till the boat touching the strand of the island, roused them from their deep reverie.

Then, each lost in thought, they went together to the sergeant's house.

"And so the boy believes that he is an angel exiled from heaven!" thought the tall stranger. "Which of us all has a right to undeceive him? Not I—I, who am so often lifted by some magic spell so far above the earth; I who am dedicate to God; I who am a mystery to myself. Have I not already seen the fairest of the angels dwelling in this mire? Is this child more or less crazed than I am? Has he taken a bolder step in the way of faith? He believes, and his belief no doubt will lead him into some path of light like that in which I walk. But though he is as beautiful as an angel, is he not too feeble to stand fast in such a struggle?"

Abashed by the presence of his companion, whose voice of thunder expressed to him his own thoughts, as lightning expresses the will of heaven, the boy was satisfied to gaze at the stars with a lover's eyes. Overwhelmed by a luxury of sentiment, which weighed on his heart, he stood there timid and weak—a midge in the sunbeams. Sigier's discourse had proved to them the mysteries of the spiritual world; the tall, old man was to invest them with glory; the lad felt them in himself, though he could in no way express them. The three represented in living embodiment Science, Poetry, and Feeling.

On going into the house, the Exile shut himself into his

room, lighted the inspiring lamp, and gave himself over to the ruthless demon of Work, seeking words of the silence and ideas of the night. Godefroid sat down on his window-sill, by turns gazing at the moon reflected in the water, and studying the mysteries of the sky. Lost in one of the trances that were frequent with him, he traveled from sphere to sphere, from vision to vision, listening for obscure rustlings and the voices of angels, and believing that he heard them; seeing, or fancying that he saw, a divine radiancé in which he lost himself; striving to attain the far-away goal, the source of all light, the font of all harmony.

Presently the vast clamor of Paris, brought down on the current, was hushed; lights were extinguished one by one in the houses; silence spread over all; and the huge city slept like a tired giant.

Midnight struck. The least noise, the fall of a leaf, or the flight of a jackdaw changing its perching-place among the pinnacles of Notre-Dame, would have been enough to bring the stranger's mind to earth again, to have made the youth drop from the celestial heights to which his soul had soared on the wings of rapture.

And then the old man heard with dismay a groan mingling with the sound of a heavy fall—the fall, as his experienced ear assured him, of a dead body. He hastened into Godefroid's room, and saw him lying in a heap with a long rope tight round his neck, the end meandering over the floor.

When he had untied it, the poor lad opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked with a hopeful gleam.

"In your own room," said the older man, looking with surprise at Godefroid's neck, and at the nail to which the cord had been tied, and which was still in the knot.

"In heaven?" said the boy, in a voice of music.

"No; on earth!"

Godefroid rose and walked along the path of light traced on the floor by the moon through the window, which stood

open; he saw the rippling Seine, the willows and plants on the island. A misty atmosphere hung over the waters like a smoky floor.

On seeing the view, to him so heartbreaking, he folded his hands over his bosom, and stood in an attitude of despair; the Exile came up to him with astonishment on his face.

"You meant to kill yourself?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Godefroid, while the stranger passed his hand about his neck again and again to feel the place where the rope had tightened on it.

But for some slight bruises, the young man had been but little hurt. His friend supposed that the nail had given way at once under the weight of the body, and the terrible attempt had ended in a fall without injury.

"And why, dear lad, did you try to kill yourself?"

"Alas!" said Godefroid, no longer restraining the tears that rolled down his cheeks, "I heard the Voice from on high; it called me by name. It had never named me before, but this time it bade me to heaven! Oh, how sweet is that voice! As I could not fly to heaven," he added artlessly, "I took the only way we know of going to God."

"My child! oh, sublime boy!" cried the old man, throwing his arms round Godefroid, and clasping him to his heart. "You are a poet; you can boldly ride the whirlwind! Your poetry does not proceed from your heart; your living, burning thoughts, your creations, move and grow in your soul. Go, never reveal your ideas to the vulgar! Be at once the altar, the priest, and the victim!"

"You know heaven, do you not? You have seen those myriads of angels, white-winged, and holding golden sistrums, all soaring with equal flight toward the Throne, and you have often seen their pinions moving at the breath of God as the trees of the forest bow with one consent before the storm. Ah, how glorious is unlimited space! Tell me."

The stranger clasped Godefroid's hand convulsively, and

they both gazed at the firmament, whence the stars seemed to shed gentle poetry which they could hear.

"Oh, to see God!" murmured Godefroid.

"Child!" said the old man suddenly, in a sterner voice, "have you so soon forgotten the holy teaching of our good master, Doctor Sigier? In order to return—you to your heavenly home and I to my native land on earth—must we not obey the voice of God? We must walk on resignedly in the stony paths where His almighty finger points the way. Do not you quail at the thought of the danger to which you exposed yourself? Arriving there without being bidden, and saying, 'Here I am!' before your time, would you not have been cast back into a world beneath that where your soul now hovers? Poor outcast cherub! Should you not rather bless God for having suffered you to live in a sphere where you may hear none but heavenly harmonies? Are you not as pure as a diamond, as lovely as a flower?

"Think what it is to know, like me, only the City of Sorrows! Dwelling there, I have worn out my heart. To search the tombs for their horrible secrets; to wipe hands steeped in blood, counting them over night after night, seeing them rise up before me imploring forgiveness which I may not grant; to mark the writhing of the assassin and the last shriek of his victim; to listen to appalling noises and fearful silence, the silence of a father devouring his dead sons; to wonder at the laughter of the damned; to look for some human form among the livid heaps wrung and trampled by crime; to learn words such as living men may not hear without dying; to call perpetually on the dead, and always to accuse and condemn! Is that living?"

"Cease!" cried Godefroid; "I cannot see you or hear you any further! My reason wanders, my eyes are dim. You light a fire within me which consumes me."

"And yet I must go on!" said the senior, waving his hand with a strange gesture that worked on the youth like a spell.

For a moment the old man fixed Godefroid with his large, weary, lightless eyes; then he pointed with one finger to the ground. A gulf seemed to open at his bidding. He remained standing in the doubtful light of the moon; it lent a glory to his brow which reflected an almost solar gleam. Though at first a somewhat disdainful expression lurked in the wrinkles of his face, his look presently assumed the fixity which seems to gaze on an object invisible to the ordinary organs of sight. His eyes, no doubt, were seeing then the remoter images which the grave has in store for us.

Never, perhaps, had this man presented so grand an aspect. A terrible struggle was going on in his soul, and reacted on his outer frame; strong man as he seemed to be, he bent as a reed bows under the breeze that comes before a storm. Godefroid stood motionless, speechless, spellbound; some inexplicable force nailed him to the floor; and, as happens when our attention takes us out of ourselves while watching a fire or a battle, he was wholly unconscious of his body.

"Shall I tell you the fate to which you were hastening, poor angel of love? Listen! It has been given to me to see immeasurable space, bottomless gulfs in which all human creations are swallowed up, the shoreless sea whither flows the vast stream of men and of angels. As I made my way through the realms of eternal torment, I was sheltered under the cloak of an immortal—the robe of glory due to genius, and which the ages hand on—I, a frail mortal! When I wandered through the fields of light where the happy souls play, I was borne up by the love of a woman, the wings of an angel; resting on her heart, I could taste the ineffable pleasures whose touch is more perilous to us mortals than are the torments of the worser world.

"As I achieved my pilgrimage through the dark regions below I had mounted from torture to torture, from crime to crime, from punishment to punishment, from awful silence to heartrending cries, until I reached the uppermost circle of

Hell. Already, from afar, I could see the glory of Paradise shining at a vast distance; I was still in darkness, but on the borders of day. I flew, upheld by my Guide, borne along by a power akin to that which, during our dreams, wafts us to spheres invisible to the eye of the body. The halo that crowned our heads scared away the shades as we passed, like impalpable dust. Far above us the suns of all the worlds shone with scarce so much light as the twinkling fireflies of my native land. I was soaring toward the fields of air where, around about Paradise, the bodies of light are in closer array, where the azure is easy to pass through, where worlds innumerable spring like flowers in a meadow.

"There, on the last level of the circles where those phantoms dwell that I had left behind me, like sorrows one would fain forget, I saw a vast shade. Standing in an attitude of aspiration, that soul looked eagerly into space; his feet were riveted by the will of God to the topmost point of the margin, and he remained for ever in the painful strain by which we project our purpose when we long to soar, as birds about to take wing. I saw the man; he neither looked at us nor heard us; every muscle quivered and throbbed; at each séparate instant he seemed to feel, though he did not move, all the fatigue of traversing the infinite that divided him from Paradise where, as he gazed steadfastly, he believed he had glimpses of a beloved image. At this last gate of Hell, as at the first, I saw the stamp of despair even in hope. The hapless creature was so fearfully held by some unseen force that his anguish entered into my bones and froze my blood. I shrank closer to my Guide, whose protection restored me to peace and silence.

"Suddenly the Shade gave a cry of joy—a cry as shrill as that of the mother bird that sees a hawk in the air or suspects its presence. We looked where he was looking, and saw, as it were, a sapphire, floating high up in the abyss of light. The glowing star fell with the swiftness of a sunbeam when it

flashes over the horizon in the morning and its first rays shoot across the world. The Splendor became clearer and grew larger; presently I beheld the cloud of glory in which the angels move—a shining vapor that emanates from their divine substance, and that glitters here and there like tongues of flame. A noble face, whose glory none may endure that have not won the mantle, the laurel, and the palm—the attribute of the Powers—rose above this cloud as white and pure as snow. It was Light within light. His wings as they waved shed dazzling ripples in the spheres through which he descended, as the glance of God pierces through the universe. At last I saw the archangel in all his glory. The flower of eternal beauty that belongs to the angels of the Spirit shone in him. In one hand he held a green palm branch, in the other a sword of flame: the palm to bestow on the pardoned soul, the sword to drive back all the hosts of Hell with one sweep. As he approached, the perfumes of Heaven fell upon us as dew. In the region where the archangel paused, the air took the hues of opal, and moved in eddies of which he was the centre. He paused, looked at the Shade, and said—

"'To-morrow.'

"Then he turned heavenward once more, spread his wings, and clove through space as a vessel cuts through the waves, hardly showing her white sails to the exiles left on some deserted shore.

"The Shade uttered appalling cries, to which the damned responded from the lowest circle, the deepest in the immensity of suffering, to the more peaceful zone near the surface on which we were standing. This worst torment of all had appealed to all the rest. The turmoil was swelled by the roar of a sea of fire which formed a bass to the terrific harmony of endless millions of suffering souls.

"Then suddenly the Shade took flight through the doleful city, and down to its place at the very bottom of Hell; but as suddenly it came up again, turned, soared through the

endless circles in every direction, as a vulture, confined for the first time in a cage, exhausts itself in vain efforts. The Shade was free to do this; he could wander through the zones of Hell—icy, fetid, or scorching—without enduring their pangs; he glided into that vastness as a sunbeam makes its way into the deepest dark.

"'God has not condemned him to any torment,' said the Master, 'but not one of the souls you have seen suffering their various punishments would exchange his anguish for the hope that is consuming this soul.'

"And just then the Shade came back to us, brought thither by an irresistible force which condemned him to parch on the verge of Hell. My divine Guide, guessing my curiosity, touched the unhappy Shade with his palm-branch. He, who was perhaps trying to measure the age of sorrow that divided him from that ever-vanishing 'To-morrow,' started and gave a look full of all the tears he had already shed.

"'You would know my woe?' said he sadly. 'Oh, I love to tell it. I am here, Teresa is above; that is all. On earth we were happy, we were always together. When I saw my loved Teresa Donati for the first time, she was ten years old. We loved each other even then, not knowing what love meant. Our lives were one; I turned pale if she were pale, I was happy in her joy; we gave ourselves up to the pleasure of thinking and feeling together; and we learned what love was, each through the other. We were wedded at Cremona; we never saw each other's lips but decked with the pearls of a smile; our eyes always shone; our hair, like our desires, flowed together; our heads were always bent over one book when we read, our feet walked in equal step. Life was one long kiss, our home was a nest.

"'One day, for the first time, Teresa turned pale and said, "I am in pain!" And I was not in pain!

"'She never rose again. I saw her sweet face change, her golden hair fade—and I did not die! She smiled to hide her

sufferings, but I could read them in her blue eyes, of which I could interpret the slightest trembling. "Honorino, I love you!" said she, at the very moment when her lips turned white, and she was clasping my hand still in hers when death chilled them. So I killed myself that she might not lie alone in her sepulchral bed, under her marble sheet. Teresa is above, and I am here. I could not bear to leave her, but God has divided us. Why, then did He unite us on earth? He is jealous! Paradise was no doubt so much the fairer on the day when Teresa entered in.

"'Do you see her? She is sad in her bliss; she is parted from me! Paradise must be a desert to her.'

"'Master,' said I with tears, for I thought of my love, 'when this one shall desire Paradise for God's sake alone, shall he not be delivered?' And the Father of Poets mildly bowed his head in sign of assent.

"We departed, cleaving the air, and making no more noise than the birds that pass overhead sometimes when we lie in the shade of a tree. It would have been vain to try to check the hapless Shade in his blasphemy. It is one of the griefs of the angels of darkness that they can never see the light even when they are surrounded by it. He would not have understood us."

At this moment the swift approach of many horses rang through the stillness, the dog barked, the constable's deep growl replied; the horsemen dismounted, knocked at the door; the noise was so unexpected that it seemed like some sudden explosion.

The two exiles, the two poets, fell to earth through all the space that divides us from the skies. The painful shock of this fall rushed through their veins like strange blood, hissing as it seemed, and full of scorching sparks. Their pain was like an electric discharge. The loud, heavy step of a man-at-arms sounded on the stairs with the iron clank of his sword,

his cuirass, and spurs; a soldier presently stood before the astonished stranger.

"We can return to Florence," said the man, whose bass voice sounded soft as he spoke in Italian.

"What is that you say?" asked the old man.

"The *Bianchi* are triumphant."

"Are you not mistaken?" asked the poet.

"No, dear Dante!" replied the soldier, whose warlike tones rang with the thrill of battle and the exultation of victory.

"To Florence! To Florence! Ah, my Florence!" cried Dante Alighieri, drawing himself up, and gazing into the distance. In fancy he saw Italy; he was gigantic.

"But I—when shall I be in heaven?" said Godefroid, kneeling on one knee before the immortal poet, like an angel before the sanctuary.

"Come to Florence," said Dante in compassionate tones. "Come! when you see its lovely landscape from the heights of Fiesole you will fancy yourself in Paradise."

The soldier smiled. For the first time, perhaps for the only time in his life, Dante's gloomy and solemn features wore a look of joy; his eyes and brow expressed the happiness he has depicted so lavishly in his vision of Paradise. He thought, perhaps, that he heard the voice of Beatrice.

A light step and the rustle of a woman's gown were audible in the silence. Dawn was now showing its first streaks of light. The fair Comtesse de Mahaut came in and flew to Godefroid.

"Come, my child, my son! I may at last acknowledge you. Your birth is recognized, your rights are under the protection of the King of France, and you will find Paradise in your mother's heart."

"I hear, I know, the voice of heaven!" cried the youth in rapture.

The exclamation roused Dante, who saw the young man

folded in the Countess' arms. He took leave of them with a look, and left his young companion on his mother's bosom.

"Come away!" he cried in a voice of thunder. "Death to the Guelphs!"

PARIS, *October*, 1831.

THE MESSAGE.

Translated by ELLEN MARRIAGE.

To M. le Marquis Damaso Pareto.

I HAVE always longed to tell a simple and true story, which should strike terror into two young lovers and drive them to take refuge each in the other's heart, as two children cling together at the sight of a snake by a woodside. At the risk of spoiling my story and of being taken for a coxcomb, I state my intention at the outset.

I myself played a part in this almost commonplace tragedy; so, if it fails to interest you, the failure will be in part my own fault, in part owing to historical veracity. Plenty of things in real life are superlatively uninteresting; so that it is one-half of art to select from realities those which contain possibilities of poetry.

In 1819 I was traveling from Paris to Moulins. The state of my finances obliged me to take an outside place. Englishmen, as you know, regard those airy perches on the top of the coach as the best seats; and for the first few miles I discovered abundance of excellent reasons for justifying the opinion of our neighbors. A young fellow, apparently in somewhat better circumstances, who came to take the seat beside me from preference, listened to my reasoning with inoffensive smiles. An approximate nearness of age, a similarity in ways of thinking, a common love of fresh air and of the rich landscape scenery through which the coach was lumbering along—these things, together with an indescribable magnetic something, drew us before long into one of those short-lived traveler's intimacies, in which we unbend with the more complacency because the intercourse is by its very nature transient and makes no implicit demands upon the future.

We had not come thirty leagues before we were talking of women and of love. Then, with all the circumspection demanded in such matters, we proceeded naturally to the topic of our lady-loves. Young as we both were, we still admired "the woman of a certain age," that is to say, the woman between thirty-five and forty. Oh! any poet who should have listened to our talk, for heaven knows how many stages beyond Montargis, would have reaped a harvest of flaming epithet, rapturous description, and very tender confidences. Our bashful fears, our silent interjections, our blushes as we met each other's eyes, were expressive with an eloquence, a boyish charm, which I have ceased to feel. One must remain young, no doubt, to understand youth.

Well, we understood one another to admiration on all the essential points of passion. We had laid it down as an axiom at the very outset, that in theory and practice there was no such piece of driveling nonsense in this world as a certificate of birth; that plenty of women were younger at forty than many a girl of twenty; and, to come to the point, that a woman is no older than she looks.

This theory set no limits to the age of love, so we struck out, in all good faith, into a boundless sea. At length, when we had portrayed our mistresses as young, charming, and devoted to us, women of rank, women of taste, intellectual and clever; when we had endowed them with little feet, a satin, nay, a delicately fragrant skin, then came the admission—on his part that Madame Such-an-one was thirty-eight years old, and on mine, that I worshiped a woman of forty. Whereupon, as if released on either side by some kind of vague fear, our confidences came thick and fast, when we found that we were of the same confraternity of love. It was which of us should overtop the other in sentiment.

One of us had traveled six hundred miles to see his mistress for an hour. The other, at the risk of being shot for a wolf, had prowled about her park to meet her one night. Out

came all our follies in fact. If it is pleasant to remember past dangers, is it not at least as pleasant to recall past delights? We live through the joy a second time. We told each other everything, our perils, our great joys, our little pleasures, and even the humors of the situation. My friend's countess had lighted a cigar for him; mine made chocolate for me, and wrote to me every day when we did not meet; his lady had come to spend three days with him at the risk of ruin to her reputation; mine had done even better, or worse, if you will have it so. Our countesses, moreover, were adored by their husbands; these gentlemen were enslaved by the charm possessed by every woman who loves; and, with even supererogatory simplicity, afforded us that just sufficient spice of danger which increases pleasure. Ah! how quickly the wind swept away our talk and our happy laughter!

When we reached Pouilly, I scanned my new friend with much interest, and, truly, it was not difficult to imagine him the hero of a very serious love affair. Picture to yourselves a young man of middle height, but very well proportioned, a bright, expressive face, dark hair, blue eyes, moist lips, and white and even teeth. A certain not unbecoming pallor still overspread his delicately cut features, and there were faint, dark circles about his eyes, as if he were recovering from an illness. Add, furthermore, that he had white and shapely hands, of which he was as careful as a pretty woman should be; add that he seemed to be very well informed and was decidedly clever, and it should not be difficult for you to imagine that my traveling companion was more than worthy of a countess. Indeed, many a girl might have wished for such a husband, for he was a vicomte with an income of twelve or fifteen thousand livres, "to say nothing of expectations."

About a league out of Pouilly the coach was overturned. My luckless comrade, thinking to save himself, jumped to the edge of a newly ploughed field, instead of following the for-

tunes of the vehicle and clinging tightly to the roof, as I did. He either miscalculated in some way, or he slipped; how it happened I do not know, but the coach fell over upon him, and he was crushed under it.

We carried him into a peasant's cottage, and there, amid the moans wrung from him by horrible sufferings, he contrived to give me a commission—a sacred task, in that it was laid upon me by a dying man's last wish. Poor boy, all through his agony he was torturing himself in his young simplicity of heart with the thought of the painful shock to his mistress when she should suddenly read of his death in a newspaper. He begged me to go myself to break the news to her. He bade me look for a key which he wore on a ribbon about his neck. I found it half-buried in the flesh, but the dying boy did not utter a sound as I extricated it as gently as possible from the wound which it had made. He had scarcely given me the necessary directions—I was to go to his home at La Charité-sur-Loire for his mistress' love-letters, which he conjured me to return to her—when he grew speechless in the middle of a sentence; but, from his last gesture, I understood that the fatal key would be my passport in his mother's house. It troubled him that he was powerless to utter a single word to thank me, for of my wish to serve him he had no doubt. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, then his eyelids drooped in token of farewell, and his head sank, and he died. His death was the only fatal accident caused by the overturn.

"But it was partly his own fault," the coachman said to me.

At La Charité, I executed the poor fellow's dying wishes. His mother was away from home, which in a manner was fortunate for me. Nevertheless, I had to assuage the grief of an old woman-servant, who staggered back at the tidings of her young master's death, and sank half-dead into a chair when she saw the blood-stained key. But I had another and more

dreadful sorrow to think of, the sorrow of a woman who had lost her last love; so I left the old woman to her prosopopeia, and carried off the precious correspondence, carefully sealed by my friend of a day.

The Countess' castle was some eight leagues beyond Moulins, and then there was some distance to walk across country. So it was not exactly an easy matter to deliver my message. For divers reasons into which I need not enter, I had barely sufficient money to take me to Moulins. However, my youthful enthusiasm determined to hasten thither on foot as fast as possible. Bad news travels swiftly, and I wished to be first at the castle. I asked for the shortest way, and hurried through the field-paths of the Bourbonnais, bearing, as it were, a dead man on my back. The nearer I came to the Castle of Montpersan, the more aghast I felt at the idea of my strange self-imposed pilgrimage. Vast numbers of romantic fancies ran in my head. I imagined all kinds of situations in which I might find this Comtesse de Montpersan, or, to observe the laws of romance, this "Juliette," so passionately beloved of my traveling companion. I sketched out ingenious answers to the questions which she might be supposed to put to me. At every turn of a wood, in every beaten pathway, I rehearsed a modern version of the scene in which Sosie describes the battle to his lantern. To my shame be it said, I had thought at first of nothing but the part that *I* was to play, of my own cleverness, of how I should demean myself; but now that I was in the country, an ominous thought flashed through my soul like a thunderbolt tearing its way through a veil of gray cloud.

What an awful piece of news it was for a woman whose whole thoughts were full of her young lover, who was looking forward hour by hour to a joy which no words can express, a woman who had been at a world of pains to invent plausible pretexts to draw him to her side. Yet, after all, it was a cruel deed of charity to be the messenger of death! So I

hurried on, splashing and bemiring myself in the by-ways of the Bourbonnais.

Before very long I reached a great chestnut avenue with a pile of buildings at the farther end—the Castle of Montpersan stood out against the sky like a mass of brown cloud, with sharp, fantastic outlines. All the doors of the castle stood open. This in itself disconcerted me, and routed all my plans; but I went in boldly, and in a moment found myself between a couple of dogs, barking as your true country-bred animal can bark. The sound brought out a hurrying servant-maid; who, when informed that I wished to speak to Mme. la Comtesse, waved a hand toward the masses of trees in the English park which wound about the castle, with "Madame is out there——"

"Many thanks," said I ironically. I might have wandered for a couple of hours in the park with her "out there" to guide me.

In the meantime, a pretty little girl, with curling hair, dressed in a white frock, a rose-colored sash, and a broad frill at the throat, had overheard or guessed the question and its answer. She gave me a glance and vanished, calling in shrill, childish tones—

"Mother! here is a gentleman who wishes to speak to you!"

And, along the winding alleys, I followed the skipping and dancing white frill, a sort of will-o'-the-wisp, that showed me the way among the trees.

I must make a full confession. I stopped behind the last shrub in the avenue, pulled up my collar, rubbed my shabby hat and my trousers with the cuffs of my sleeves, dusted my coat with the sleeves themselves, and then gave them a final cleansing rub one against the other. I buttoned my coat carefully so as to exhibit the inner, always the least worn, side of the cloth, and finally had turned down the bottom of my trousers over my boots, artistically cleaned in the grass. Thanks to

this Gascon toilet, I could hope that the lady would not take me for the local tax-collector; but now, when my thoughts travel back to that episode of my youth, I sometimes laugh at my own expense.

Suddenly, just as I was composing myself, at a turning in the green walk, among a wilderness of flowers lighted up by a hot ray of sunlight, I saw Juliette—Juliette and her husband. The pretty little girl held her mother by the hand, and it was easy to see that the lady had quickened her pace somewhat at the child's ambiguous phrase. Taken aback by the sight of a total stranger, who bowed with a tolerably awkward air, she looked at me with a coolly courteous expression and an adorable pout, in which I, who knew her secret, could read the full extent of her disappointment. I sought, but sought in vain, to remember any of the elegant phrases so laboriously prepared.

This momentary hesitation gave the lady's husband time to come forward. Thoughts by the myriad flitted through my brain. To give myself a countenance, I got out a few sufficiently feeble inquiries, asking whether the persons present were really M. le Comte and Mme. la Comtesse de Montpersan. These imbecilities gave me time to form my own conclusions at a glance, and, with a perspicacity rare at that age, to analyze the husband and wife whose solitude was about to be so rudely disturbed.

The husband seemed to be a specimen of a certain type of nobleman, the fairest ornaments of the provinces of our day. He wore big shoes with stout soles to them. I put the shoes first advisedly, for they made an even deeper impression upon me than a seedy black coat, a pair of threadbare trousers, a flabby cravat, or a crumpled shirt collar. There was a touch of the magistrate in the man, a good deal more of the councilor of the prefecture, all the self-importance of the mayor of the arrondissement, the local autocrat, and the soured temper of the unsuccessful candidate who has never been returned

since the year 1816. As to countenance—a weazened, wrinkled, sunburned face, and long, sleek locks of scanty gray hair; as to character—an incredible mixture of homely sense and sheer silliness; of a rich man's overbearing ways, and a total lack of manners; just the kind of husband who is almost entirely led by his wife, yet imagines himself to be the master; apt to domineer in trifles, and to let more important things slip past unheeded—there you have the man! A typical French "farmer-gentleman."

But the Countess! Ah, how sharp and startling the contrast between husband and wife! The Countess was a little woman, with a flat, graceful figure and enchanting shape; so fragile, so dainty was she that you would have feared to break some bone if you so much as touched her. She wore a white muslin dress, a rose-colored sash, and rose-colored ribbons in the pretty cap on her head; her chemisette was moulded so deliciously by her shoulders and the loveliest rounded contours, that the sight of her awakened an irresistible desire of possession in the depths of the heart. Her eyes were bright and dark and expressive, her movements graceful, her foot charming. An experienced man of pleasure would not have given her more than thirty years, her forehead was so girlish. She had all the most transient delicate detail of youth in her face. In character she seemed to me to resemble the Comtesse de Lignolles and the Marquise de B——, two feminine types always fresh in the memory of any young man who has read Louvet's romance.

In a moment I saw how things stood, and took a diplomatic course that would have done credit to an old ambassador. For once, and perhaps for the only time in my life, I used tact, and knew in what the special skill of courtiers and men of the world consists.

I have had so many battles to fight since those heedless days, that they have left me no time to distill all the least actions of daily life, and to do everything so that it falls in

with those rules of etiquette and good taste which wither the most generous emotions.

"Monsieur le Comte," I said with an air of mystery, "I should like a few words with you," and I fell back a pace or two.

He followed my example. Juliette left us together, going away unconcernedly, like a wife who knew that she can learn her husband's secrets as soon as she chooses to know them.

I told the Comte briefly of the death of my traveling companion. The effect produced by my news convinced me that his affection for his young collaborator was cordial enough, and this emboldened me to make reply as I did.

"My wife will be in despair," cried he; "I shall be obliged to break the news of this unhappy event with great caution."

"Monsieur," said I, "I addressed myself to you in the first instance, as in duty bound. I could not, without first informing you, deliver a message to Madame la Comtesse, a message intrusted to me by an entire stranger; but this commission is a sort of sacred trust, a secret of which I have no power to dispose. From the high idea of your character which he gave me, I felt sure that you would not oppose me in the fulfillment of a dying request. Madame la Comtesse will be at liberty to break the silence which is imposed upon me."

At this eulogy, the Count swung his head very amiably, responded with a tolerably involved compliment, and finally left me a free field. We returned to the house. The bell rang, and I was invited to dinner. As we came up to the house, a grave and silent couple, Juliette stole a glance at us. Not a little surprised to find her husband contriving some frivolous excuse for leaving us together, she stopped short, giving me a glance—such a glance as women only can give you. In that look of hers there was the pardonable curiosity of the mistress of the house confronted with a guest dropped

down upon her from the skies, and innumerable doubts, certainly warranted by the state of my clothes, by my youth and my expression, all singularly at variance; there was all the disdain of the adored mistress, in whose eyes all men save one are as nothing; there were involuntary tremors and alarms; and, above all, the thought that it was tiresome to have an unexpected guest just now, when, no doubt, she had been scheming to enjoy full solitude for her love. This mute eloquence I understood in her eyes, and all the pity and compassion in me made answer in a sad smile. I thought of her, as I had seen her for one moment, in the pride of her beauty; standing in the sunny afternoon in the narrow alley with the flowers on either hand; and, as that fair wonderful picture rose before my eyes, I could not repress a sigh.

"Alas! madame, I have just made a very arduous journey——, undertaken solely on your account."

"Sir!"

"Oh! it is on behalf of one who calls you Juliette that I am come," I continued. Her face grew white.

"You will not see him to-day."

"Is he ill?" she asked, and her voice sank lower.

"Yes. But for pity's sake, control yourself—— He intrusted me with secrets that concern you, and you may be sure that never messenger could be more discreet nor more devoted than I."

"What is the matter with him?"

"How if he loved you no longer?"

"Oh! that is impossible!" she cried, and a faint smile, nothing less than frank, broke over her face. Then all at once a kind of shudder ran through her and she reddened, and she gave me a wild, swift glance as she asked—

"Is he alive?"

Great God! What a terrible phrase! I was too young to bear that tone in her voice; I made no reply, only looked at the unhappy woman in helpless bewilderment.

"Monsieur, monsieur, give me an answer!" she cried with vehemence.

"Yes, madame."

"Is it true? Oh! tell me the truth; I can hear the truth. Tell me the truth! Any pain would be less keen than this suspense."

I answered by two tears wrung from me by that strange tone of hers. She leaned against a tree, with a faint, sharp cry.

"Madame, here comes your husband!"

"Have I a husband?" and with those words she fled away out of sight.

"Well," cried the Count, "dinner is growing cold. Come, monsieur."

Thereupon I followed the master of the house into the dining-room. Dinner was served with all the luxury which we have learned to expect in Paris. There were five covers laid, three for the Count and Countess and their little daughter; my own, which should have been *his;* and another for the canon of Saint-Denis, who said grace, and then asked—

"Why, where can our dear Countess be?"

"Oh! she will be here directly," said the Count. He had hastily helped us to the soup, and was dispatching an ample plateful with portentous speed.

"Oh! nephew," exclaimed the canon, "if your wife was here, you would behave more rationally."

"Papa will make himself ill!" said the child with a mischievous look.

Just after this extraordinary gastronomical episode, as the Count was eagerly helping himself to a slice of venison, a housemaid came in with, "We cannot find madame anywhere, sir!"

I sprang up at the words with a dread in my mind, my fears written so plainly in my face that the old canon came out after me into the garden. The Count, for the sake of appearances, came as far as the threshold.

"Don't go, don't go!" called he. "Don't trouble yourselves in the least," but he did not offer to accompany us.

We three—the canon, the housemaid, and I—hurried through the garden-walks and over the bowling-green in the park, shouting, listening for an answer, growing more uneasy every moment. As we hurried along, I told the story of the fatal accident, and discovered how strongly the maid was attached to her mistress, for she took my secret dread far more seriously than the canon. We went along by the pools of water; all over the park we went; but we neither found the Countess nor any sign that she had passed that way. At last we turned back, and under the walls of some outbuildings I heard a smothered, wailing cry, so stifled that it was scarcely audible. The sound seemed to come from a place that might have been a granary. I went in at all risks, and there we found Juliette. With the instinct of despair, she had buried herself deep in the hay, hiding her face in it to deaden those dreadful cries—pudency even stronger than grief. She was sobbing and crying like a child, but there was a more poignant, more piteous sound in the sobs. There was nothing left in the world for her. The maid pulled the hay from her, her mistress submitting with the supine listlessness of a dying animal. The maid could find nothing to say but "There! madame; there, there——"

"What is the matter with her? What is it, niece?" the old canon kept on exclaiming.

At last, with the girl's help, I carried Juliette to her room, gave orders that she was not to be disturbed, and that every one must be told that the Countess was suffering from a sick headache. Then we came down to the dining-room, the canon and I.

Some little time had passed since we left the dinner-table; I had scarcely given a thought to the Count since we left him under the peristyle; his indifference had surprised me, but my amazement increased when we came back and found him

seated philosophically at table. He had eaten pretty nearly all the dinner, to the huge delight of his little daughter; the child was smiling at her father's flagrant infraction of the Countess' rules. The man's odd indifference was explained to me by a mild altercation which at once arose with the canon. The Count was suffering from some serious complaint. I cannot remember now what it was, but his medical advisers had put him on a very severe regimen, and the ferocious hunger familiar to convalescents, sheer animal appetite, had overpowered all human sensibilities. In that little space I had seen frank and undisguised human nature under two very different aspects, in such a sort that there was a certain grotesque element in the very midst of a most terrible tragedy.

The evening that followed was dreary. I was tired. The canon racked his brains to discover a reason for his niece's tears. The lady's husband silently digested his dinner; content, apparently, with the Countess' rather vague explanation, sent through the maid, putting forward some feminine ailment as her excuse. We all went early to bed.

As I passed the door of the Countess' room on the way to my night's lodging, I asked the servant timidly for news of her. She heard my voice, and would have me come in, and tried to talk, but in vain—she could not utter a sound. She bent her head, and I withdrew. In spite of the painful agitation, which I had felt to the full as youth can feel, I fell asleep, tired out with my forced march.

It was late in the night when I was awakened by the grating sound of curtain rings drawn sharply over the metal rods. There sat the Countess at the foot of my bed. The light from a lamp set on my table fell full upon her face.

"Is it really true, monsieur, quite true?" she asked. "I do not know how I can live after that awful blow which struck me down a little while since; but just now I feel calm. I want to know everything."

"What calm!" I said to myself as I saw the ghastly pallor

of her face contrasting with her brown hair, and heard the guttural tones of her voice. The havoc wrought in her drawn features filled me with dumb amazement.

Those few hours had bleached her; she had lost a woman's last glow of autumn color. Her eyes were red and swollen, nothing of their beauty remained, nothing looked out of them save her bitter and exceeding grief; it was as if a gray cloud covered the place through which the sun had shone.

I gave her the story of the accident in a few words, without laying too much stress on some too harrowing details. I told her about our first day's journey, and how it had been filled with recollections of her and of love. And she listened eagerly, without shedding a tear, leaning her face toward me, as some zealous doctor might lean to watch any change in a patient's face. When she seemed to me to have opened her whole heart to pain, to be deliberately plunging herself into misery with the first delirious frenzy of despair, I caught at my opportunity, and told her of the fears that troubled the poor dying man, told her how and why it was that he had given me this fatal message. Then her tears were dried by the fires that burned in the dark depths within her. She grew even paler. When I drew the letters from beneath my pillow and held them out to her, she took them mechanically; then, trembling from head to foot, she said in a hollow voice—

"And *I* burned all his letters! I have nothing of him left! Nothing! nothing!"

She struck her hand against her forehead.

"Madame——" I began.

She glanced at me in the convulsion of grief.

"I cut this from his head, this lock of his hair."

And I gave her that last imperishable token that had been a very part of him she loved. Ah! if you had felt as I felt then, her burning tears falling on your hands, you would know what gratitude is, when it follows so closely upon the benefit. Her eyes shone with a feverish glitter, a faint ray of

happiness gleamed out of her terrible suffering, as she grasped my hands in hers, and said, in a choking voice and with grievous sobs—

"Ah! you love! May you be happy always. May you never lose her whom you love."

She broke off, and fled away with her treasure.

Next morning, this night-scene among my dreams seemed like a dream; to make sure of the piteous truth, I was obliged to look fruitlessly under my pillow for the packet of letters. There is no need to tell you how the next day went. I spent several hours of it with the Juliette whom my poor comrade had so praised to me. In her lightest words, her gestures, in all that she did and said, I saw proofs of the nobleness of soul, the delicacy of feeling which made her what she was, one of those beloved, loving, and self-sacrificing natures so rarely found upon this earth.

In the evening the Comte de Montpersan came himself as far as Moulins with me. There he spoke with a kind of embarrassment—

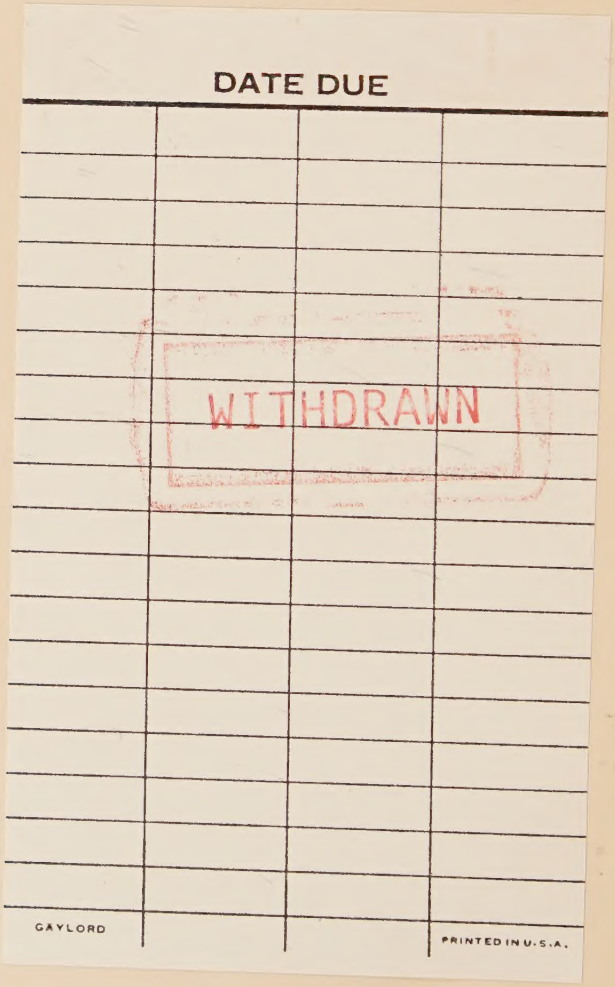
"Monsieur, if it is not abusing your good-nature and acting very inconsiderately toward a stranger to whom we are already under obligations, would you have the goodness, as you are going to Paris, to remit a sum of money to M. de—— (I forget the name), in the Rue du Sentier; I owe him an amount, and he asked me to send it as soon as possible?"

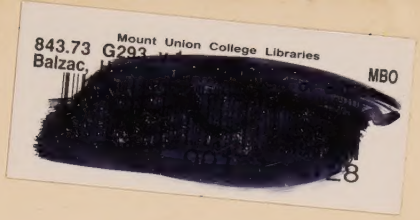
"Willingly," said I. And in the innocence of my heart I took charge of a rouleau of twenty-five louis d'or, which paid the expenses of my journey back to Paris; and only when, on my arrival, I went to the address indicated to repay the amount to M. de Montpersan's correspondent, did I understand the ingenious delicacy with which Julie had obliged me. Was not all the genius of a loving woman revealed in such a way of lending, in her reticence with regard to a poverty easily guessed?

And what rapture to have this adventure to tell to a woman who clung to you more closely in dread, saying, "Oh, my dear, not you! *you* must not die!"

PARIS, *January*, 1832.

WITHDRAWN

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